



Rs 8.00

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

ISSN 0032-6178



9 770032 617002

November 2008
The Puranic Trail – II

Vol. 113, No. 11



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

Vol. 113, No. 11
November 2008



Amrita Kalasha

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prabuddha Bharata
Advaita Ashrama
PO Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
Dt Champawat · 262 524
Uttarakhand, India
E-mail: prabuddhabharata@gmail.com
pb@advaitaashrama.org

PUBLICATION OFFICE

Advaita Ashrama
5 Dehi Entally Road
Kolkata · 700 014
Tel: 91 · 33 · 2264 0898 / 2264 4000
2286 6450 / 2286 6483
E-mail: mail@advaitaashrama.org

INTERNET EDITION AT:

www.advaitaashrama.org

PB November 2008

Contents

Traditional Wisdom	567
This Month	568
Editorial: Understanding Dharma	569
Sri Krishna: The Eternal Inspiration	571
Swami Tadgatananda	
Bhishma: A Model of Heroism	576
Swami Tathagatananda	
Kunti: Nobility, Fortitude, and Sacrifice	580
Swami Tattwasarananda	
Narada: The Sage Celestial	584
Swami Purnananda	
Beyond Human Relationship	592
Dilip Dhovakar	
Religion, Atheism, and Evolution of Thought	595
Mehul Desai	
Narada Bhakti Sutra	598
Swami Bhaskareswarananda	
Light on Patanjali – IV	603
Swami Sarvagatananda	
Ramakrishna's Influence on Girish's Plays	606
Swami Chetanananda	
Reviews	610
Reports	613

TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

Mahāmanā : The Noble

November 2008

Vol. 113, No. 11

करे श्लाघ्यस्त्यागः शिरसि गुरुपादप्रणयिता
मुखे सत्या वाणी विजयिभुजयोर्वीर्यमतुलम् ।
हृदि स्वस्था वृत्तिः श्रुतमधिगतैकव्रतफलं
विनाप्यैश्वर्येण प्रकृतिमहतां मण्डनमिदम् ॥

Hands blessed with charity, head bearing devotion to the guru; truthful speech on the tongue, powerful arms that are ever-victorious; a wholesome ideal in the heart, the result of one-pointed devotion to acquisition of scriptural truths—these are the ornaments the noble possess, even when they are bereft of authority.

दानाय लक्ष्मीः सुकृताय विद्या चिन्ता परब्रह्मविनिश्चयाय ।
परोपकाराय वचांसि यस्य बन्धस्त्रिलोकीतिलकः स एकः ॥

Whose wealth is for charity, learning for good works, thought for ascertaining the truth of the Supreme Brahman, and words for helping others—he alone is the best among those honoured in the three worlds.

स्पृहणीयाः कस्य न ते सुमतेः सरलाशया महात्मानः ।
त्रयमपि येषां सदृशं हृदयं वचनं तथाचारः ॥

Who among the wise will not wish to associate with simple-hearted noble souls whose heart, speech, and acts are all alike?

धनिनोऽपि निरुन्मादा युवानोऽपि न चञ्चलाः ।
प्रभवोऽप्यप्रमत्तास्ते महामहिमशालिनः ॥

They indeed are possessed of greatness who are not maddened by wealth, who are not fickle despite their youth, and who are not careless even when in power.

इदं हि माहात्म्यविशेषसूचकं वदन्ति चिह्नं महतां मनीषिणः ।
मनो यदेषां सुखदुःखसंभवे प्रयाति नो हर्षविषादवश्यताम् ॥

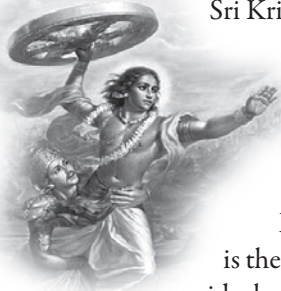
This indeed has been spoken of by the wise as a distinctive mark of the noble—their minds are not overcome by joy and sorrow in the face of pleasure and pain.

THIS MONTH

The Itihasas and the Puranas are encyclopaedias of ancient Indian thought that continue to shape the Indian ethos. Through history, legend, mythical narratives, and thought-provoking discourses they paint a complex yet accessible picture of the nature of the human world, helping us in **Understanding Dharma**, the way of living that is in accord with the workings of the cosmos. In this number we continue our study of some of the epic and Puranic characters.

The richly diverse personality of Sri Krishna is a perfect reflection of the richness of the divine Ground. The reconciliation of paradoxes in his being are equally the echoes of the infinitude that subsumes all paradoxes even as it transcends them. In his article **Krishna: The Eternal Inspiration**, Swami Tadgatanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Patna, gives us a brief glimpse into the singular per-

sonality that is
Sri Krishna.

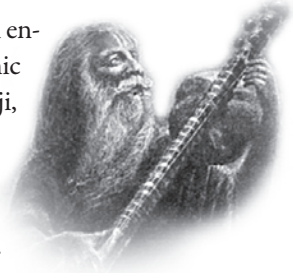


Bhishma

is the personification of the ethical ideals of the Mahabharata. His self-mastery, integrity, and willingness to make great personal sacrifices set him apart from his contemporaries. His philosophy of life provides us important insights for understanding dharma. **Bhishma: A Model of Heroism** is Swami Tathagatanandaji's review of those aspects of Bhishma's personality that had a powerful influence on his contemporaries. The author is Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society, New York.

In **Kunti: Nobility, Fortitude, and Sacrifice**, Swami Tattwasaranandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Sikshanamandira, Belur, examines how Kunti stood up to all the trials and tribulations that she was confronted with, even as she conscientiously walked the path of dharma and devotion.

Narada is a much-loved, though enigmatic sage, an archetypal Puranic personality. Swami Purnanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission TB Sanatorium, Ranchi, has sketched his unusual life story in **Narada: The Sage Celestial**.



Beyond Human Relationship is Sri Dilip Dhovavkar's reading of the fundamental problems underlying strained human relationships and the way to address them. The author is a coordinator of youth activities at Ramakrishna Math, Pune.

Sri Mehul Desai shares some personal reflections on **Religion, Atheism, and Evolution of Thought** with the hope of fostering greater dialogue on religion. The author is Chief Operating Officer, C-SAM.

In the third instalment of **Narada Bhakti Sutra**, Swami Bhaskareswaranandaji, former President, Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur, discusses the features of *para bhakti* as elucidated by various acharyas.

Swami Sarvagatanandaji, Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Boston, stresses the need for sincerity in spiritual life and elucidates some of the important facets of meditation in **Light on Patanjali – IV**.

In the final instalment of **Ramakrishna's Influence on Girish's Plays**, Swami Chetananandaji, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, summarizes the text of the religious dramas *Purnachandra* and *Nasiram*.

Understanding Dharma

THE quest for dharma is the single most important concern of the Mahabharata. That victory—both moral and material—is bound to follow those who pursue the path of dharma seems to be a settled conviction with the characters who people the Mahabharata: *yato dharmah tato jayah*. The Mimamsakas, Vedic ritualists, consider dharma to be ‘that which is enjoined by the Vedas; *codanā-lakṣaṇārtho dharmah*.’ To the atomists of the Vaisheṣika school ‘dharma is that which conduces to happiness and liberation; *yato’abhyudaya-niḥśreyasa-siddhiḥ sa dharmah*. The Mahabharata also attempts to define the term in several ways: *yat-syād-prabhava-samyuktam sa dharma iti niścayah*, that which leads to advancement and growth is dharma; *yat-syād-ahimsā-samyuktam sa dharma iti niścayah*, that which prevents injury to creatures is dharma; *yat-syād-dhāraṇā-samyuktam sa dharma iti niścayah*, that which upholds all creatures is dharma. But the Mahabharata is not a definitional discourse. The rich array of personages from all walks of life—rishis, kings, housewives, shopkeepers, scholars, gods, and yakshas, among others—who debate matters pertaining to dharma in the Mahabharata are not merely indulging in an intellectual pastime. Their struggles, triumphs, and misfortunes are all closely linked to their doubts, dilemmas, and bold assertions.

One of the many abstruse questions that Dharma, in the guise of a yaksha, asked Yudhishthira was this: ‘What is the way?’ The obvious answer is, ‘The way of Dharma.’ But Yudhishthira, despite his devotion to ideals, is more pragmatic here. He says:

*Tarko’apratīṣṭhaḥ śrutayo vibhinna
naiko ṛṣiryasya matam pramāṇam;
Dharmasya tattvaṁ nihitam guhāyām
mahājano yena gataḥ sa panthāḥ.*

Arguments lead to no certain conclusions, the scriptures are varied, and there is no single rishi whose opinion is accepted by all. The truth about dharma is hidden deep; so the path that the great have trodden is the way.

Yudhishthira’s answer is in keeping with the method of the Mahabharata. The personal histories of the characters in the epic are living lessons in ethics and values—the way of dharma—and are perhaps more instructive than what the protagonists actually tell us about dharma. We are apt to remember these epic figures as character prototypes: the versatile Krishna, the heroic Bhishma, the righteous Yudhishthira, the impetuous Draupadi, the unscrupulous Duryodhana, the scheming Shakuni, and the forbearing Kunti. But a closer reading of the text tells us that all these personalities are far from monochromatic. The heroes are not devoid of weaknesses, nor the villains without their share of virtue.

Bhishma may be taken as a case in point. In this number, Swami Tathagatanandaji has presented us a sketch of Bhishma as the heroic ideal of the epic age. Bhishma embodies moral purity and uprightness. Like Rama, he does not go back on his word, even though it cost his life. But his strict adherence to the letter of the law also has adverse repercussions. As Prof. Sitansu Chakravarti puts it in his *Ethics in the Mahabharata*, ‘Bhishma surely does his duties according to the old system. He does not realize, however, that something needs to be done to stabilize the political situation of the land, on the principle of propriety and justice. ... In the very kingdom of Hastinapura, where he lives, things are not going according to the principles of justice. Bhishma is wise enough to understand everything, but does not initiate action to resolve the situation,

sensing that the area falls outside his domain of responsibilities, for he is not the monarch of the land.' Prof. Chakravarti contrasts this behaviour with that of Krishna's who 'takes it as his responsibility to try to do what is needed, although he is not the monarch of the land either'. Again, one cannot help feeling that 'Bhishma is at fault when he does not say a thing against the attempted disrobing of Draupadi in court, in his presence'. In contrast, Krishna 'considers it incumbent on himself to do the needful'. And despite having saved Draupadi from total humiliation 'he thinks that his indebtedness to Draupadi keeps on increasing every day, as he had failed to give her [adequate] protection'.

Even Bhishma's decision to fight on the Kaurava side in the Kurukshetra war raises important questions. Loyalty is essential to the stability of any group or community; true. And Bhishma, the common grandfather of the Kaurava and the Pandava princes, had long been overseeing the administration of the Kuru kingdom as well as the Kuru family. But how does Bhishma balance his occupational loyalties with his devotion to righteousness? He is convinced that the Pandava's is a just cause and they are bound to emerge victorious. His personal sympathies are also with the Pandavas. But this does not prevent him from promising Duryodhana that he would kill no less than ten thousand warriors of the opposing army every day. And he kept his word for all the ten days that he was in battle.

Killing in open war is not considered unrighteous for kshatriyas in the Mahabharata. Thus even though the soldiers he killed were on the side of the righteous Pandavas, Bhishma had no compunction in killing them. Of course, a close reading of the ethics of war in the Mahabharata times makes war appear a sport, with the significant difference that losers often chose to fight till death. More important, Bhishma had his own limits to personal loyalties. Thus when the Pandavas approached him at the end of nine days of war and asked him how he could be killed—that was the only way he could be stopped from decimating the Pandava army—he had no hesitation in outlining the means of his own

death. Matters could not have been otherwise, for Bhishma had a boon from his father that he would only die by choice.

There are, of course, deeper levels to the drama—texts that evade the ordinary eye, though not Bhishma's. Shikhandi, under whose cover Arjuna fells Bhishma, was born a woman but had exchanged his body with a yaksha. In Bhishma's eyes, he is not a man. Moreover, he is Amba reborn. Amba, who was brought by Bhishma from Varanasi to be married to his cousin Vichitravirya, only to be left on her own after she professed her affection for Shalwa. Shalwa rejected her, and Bhishma would not agree to her proposal that he marry her to save her from humiliation.

It could well be debated if Bhishma's vow of life-long celibacy—the reason for his refusal—justified the humiliation that Amba suffered. Amba was bent on revenge at all costs. But to wreak vengeance on a person as righteous as Bhishma was not easy. Amba had to take recourse to another life, and a problematic one at that, to be the cause of Bhishma's death. And whose choice was it? Did Bhishma die of his own choice or of Shikhandi's?

Bhishma told the Pandavas, 'Amba hates me. But love and hate have but a shifting connotation. A slight change in the point of view, and they are the same. She is the one person who will grant me release from the bondage of life which has been imposed on me.' The Mahabharata tells us about Bhishma's cosmic dimensions. He is one of the Vasus, the eight celestial deities. He was born on earth to atone for a transgression. So death of his earthly frame was in fact a release into his own divine nature.

Through all the complexities of this plot, through all its paradoxes and ethical dilemmas, one message stands out: that we can be the masters of our own destiny. We can choose to keep driving ourselves through the incredibly intricate maze of human relations, which constantly challenges our freedom and human capacities, or work to grow into our larger selves. Dharma would help us either way.



Sri Krishna: The Eternal Inspiration

Swami Tadgatananda

IT was the eighth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Shravana. The asterism Rohini was on the ascendant and the planetary conjunctions were all highly favourable. Peaceful silence reigned over the quarters. The rivers were tranquil and ponds full of beautiful lotuses. The woods were resonant with the chirping of birds and the buzzing of bees. Trees and creepers were all bedecked with flowers. The air was pure, a gentle fragrant breeze was blowing across the fields, and the fires in the sacrificial hearths were aglow. The minds of all good souls were peaceful and happy. It was at such a time in the pitch darkness of midnight that Vishnu, who resides in the hearts of all, was born of the divine Devaki, like the full moon on the eastern horizon.¹

Devaki's child was but the plenitude of Brahman, *pūrṇa brahma*, manifesting its powers through the human form of an avatara, to uphold dharma and restore balance in a world afflicted with anomie. He was quick to remind his imprisoned parents about his true nature, and the parents, gifted with divine insight, were equally quick to apprehend the implications. Mother Devaki could not hide her awe:

*Viśvaṁ yadetat svatanau niśānte
yathāvakāśaṁ puruṣaḥ paro bhavān;
Bibharti so'yaṁ mama garbhago'bhūd-
aho nṛlokasya vidambanaṁ hi tat.*

That you the Supreme Being, who hold the whole universe within yourself at the time of your cosmic sleep, have been born of my womb is only your imitation of human ways to hide your identity—what a great joke you are playing on the world (10.3.31)!

Krishna was not the first incarnation of Vishnu. So Devaki was not unaware of the special manifestation of the Divine in human form. But to have the Divine for one's child was overwhelming even

for Devaki. The incarnation is 'the meeting point of all contradictions, the best visible expression of the invisible divine ground', and in Krishna, the eighth major avatara of Vishnu, we find reconciled a host of paradoxes. That the apparently frail infant in Devaki's lap could inform her of his extraordinary nature was only one of the many acts that sets apart Krishna from other humans, even as it points to the infinite potential latent in the human frame. Of the many avatars—and the Bhagavata speaks of the possibility of infinite divine incarnations—Krishna's life remains uniquely etched in the Indian consciousness. Not only have his life and teachings had a major impact in the development of Indian culture—both religious and secular—his legend has been an integral part of the lives of numerous Indians down the ages. His miraculous and heroic exploits have provided the theme for numerous and varied representations in literature, art, music, sculpture, folk song, and drama. For littérateurs, artists, and spiritual seekers he is an eternal inspiration.

Perfection Personified

The Bhagavata, the Mahabharata, and the *Harivamsha* are our main literary sources on the life and lilas of Sri Krishna. The Bhagavata was recorded by Vyasa, famous for his prolific scholarship, and was narrated by another remarkable personality, Shukadeva, who 'from his very birth, by virtue of his enlightened state, wandered forth from home and relatives, all alone and duteless', and who, when followed by his grief-stricken father, Dvaipayana Vyasa, with cries of "O son! Where are you?" answered, as it were, through the resonance of the forest trees, since he was the soul of everything on account of his realization of the truth of non-duality.² The raconteur had to be out of the ordinary, for the Krishna saga

is no ordinary tale. The Krishna of the Bhagavata is a paragon of perfection, and though in the Mahabharata there are times when he seems to act like ordinary humans, swayed by emotions and temporal exigencies—as when he advises Yudhishtira to kill Drona by employing a half truth, or when he tries to engage himself in battle despite his promise not to wield weapons during the Kurukshetra war—he remains the master of the lila in which he is voluntarily engaged. In him we have a richly diverse personality—beloved child, divine youth, loving brother, dear friend, mighty warrior, obedient and worthy disciple, wise and able administrator, master strategist, tactful messenger, and supreme teacher. All these and countless other aspects of his personality only underscore a total and perfect manifestation of the Divine.

The numerous people who get to know him—from his father Vasudeva and the simple devotee Shrutadeva of Mithila, to celestial deities like Indra and Brahma—take great pains to announce that Krishna is not merely the repository of exceptional human qualities; his being is the very substratum of all existence. In his transcendental nature he is Satchidananda, the absolute Reality, absolute Consciousness, and absolute Bliss. His singular intelligence and divine love are but earthly manifestations of his transcendental nature. He is not merely immortal, he is the very embodiment of immortality. Though our appraisal of the multifaceted and multi-dimensional life of Sri Krishna is bound to be coloured by our own views and understanding, serious study and contemplation on his life is sure to enrich us.

Sri Krishna plays an important role in all the major events of the Mahabharata, albeit often in



Gopala and Yashoda

a quiet and unassuming manner. He is a friend, philosopher, and guide to the Pandavas. He counsels and protects them through all their trials and tribulations. The one point he never fails to drive home to us through virtually all of his actions is the need to tread the path of dharma, for that is the way to the highest good. The path of dharma is neither easy nor pleasant. Even Bhishma is left to wonder on his death

bed that the ways of the Divine are indeed inscrutable—despite having Krishna on their side, the Pandavas seem to suffer perpetual trials.

Krishna upholds the dignity of all work through personal example. He has no hesitation in washing the feet of the guests at Yudhishtira's Rajasuya Yajna, undertakes the work of a messenger to the Kaurava court even at the risk of personal humiliation, and willingly undertakes to be Arjuna's charioteer during the Mahabharata war. That Arjuna prefers the non-combatant Krishna to an entire army is highly significant. When Krishna questions him about this apparently irrational act, Arjuna replies: 'With you as my charioteer on the battlefield, the world will have occasion to see how dharma is established in this diabolical world. It will not be a whip that you will wield in your blessed hand; it will be the sceptre of dharma. With the reins of my horses in your hand, I will have little reason to worry. Where there is dharma, there victory is. And where there is Krishna, there dharma reigns.'³

The Embodiment of the Gita

It was on the battlefield of Kurukshetra that the immortal and perennially inspiring teachings of the Bhagavadgita poured forth from Krishna's lips. Swami Ranganathananda observes:

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION INSTITUTE OF CULTURE, GOL PARK

Arjuna and Śrī Kṛṣṇa were remarkable personalities; they were warriors. And the teacher, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, was a man full of compassion, and endowed with universal vision. The *Gītā* is thus a heroic message from a heroic teacher to a heroic pupil. Its universality makes it applicable to any human being anywhere in the world, to make him or her realize one's fullest human possibilities. The Upaniṣads or the Vedānta expounded the science of human possibilities a thousand years earlier, and the *Gītā* expounds the practical application of that science. Hence, Swami Vivekananda considered the *Gītā* as the best book of practical Vedānta.⁴

Krishna's teachings are for everyone—as much for the beginner in spiritual life as for the most advanced sadhaka. Whether one is inclined towards karma, bhakti, or jnana—one can benefit greatly by studying the Gita. It has the essence of all Vedic and Upanishadic knowledge. As the colophon at the end of each chapter of the Gita announces, the text is both *brahma vidyā*, an exposition on the knowledge of Brahman, as well as *yoga śāstra*, a compendium of the science of yoga. 'Its message is universal, practical, strengthening, and purifying' (14).

Swami Vivekananda says:

This was the great work of Krishna: to clear our eyes and make us look with broader vision upon humanity in its march upward and onward. His was the first heart that was large enough to see truth in all, his the first lips that uttered beautiful words for each and all. ...

Two ideas [stand] supreme in his message: The first is the harmony of different ideas; the second is non-attachment. A man can attain to perfection, the highest goal, sitting on a throne, commanding armies, working out big plans for nations.⁵

Krishna affirmed the plurality of approaches to the Divine and the validity of every path tread with sincerity: 'In whatsoever way people approach Me, even so do I reward them, for it is my path, O Partha, that people follow in all things.'⁶ Again, 'Whatever be the form a devotee seeks to worship with faith—in that very form I make his faith unwavering' (7.21). Swami Vivekananda reminds us:

We are always after truth, but never want to get it. We simply want the pleasure to go about and ask. We have a lot of energy and spend it that way. That is why Krishna says: Get hold of any one of these chains that are stretched out from the common centre. No one step is greater than another. ... Blame no view of religion so far as it is sincere. Hold on to one of these links, and it will pull you to the centre. Your heart itself will teach all the rest. The teacher within will teach all the creeds, all the philosophies.⁷

The Gita provides spiritual food for seekers of every shade. In the very second chapter, Krishna teaches Arjuna about the immortality of the soul—that in its real nature the Atman is one with the absolute Brahman. In later chapters, he explicates the means to realization of the Divine. These include cultivation of the *daivī sampad*, divine attributes of character, avoidance of such opposites as attachment and hatred, and practice of various spiritual disciplines harmonizing them in one's life. He reminds Arjuna of the impermanence of the world and advises him to practise non-attachment assiduously and perform his duties without hankering for results. He emphasizes that cultivating real devotion and dependence on God is the key to happiness in life.

Krishna is himself the embodiment of the teachings of the Gita. A cursory look at his life is enough to convince us that from his very birth difficulties and problems kept pounding him like waves, one after the other; but he faced them all with perfect equanimity—with a smile on his lips. His numerous victories did not affect his poise, nor was he dejected on having to flee in the face of Jarasandha's threats. He performed the duties of every station of life to perfection, but remained unattached all the same. He was strongly committed to the welfare of the inhabitants of Vrindavan, who were not only deeply attached to him but also loved him with all their hearts. However, this did not prevent him from moving to Mathura and then to Dwaraka in response to the call of duty. In fact, he never looked back at Vrindavan, the playground of his childhood, even though he ensured the well-being of its residents. He was equally at ease on the throne of Dwaraka and the seat of the charioteer.

He is the perfect master of yoga, the *yogīśvara*; in his person are harmonized all the yogas.

The Deity

Through the ages, innumerable devotees have adored Krishna as their Chosen Deity, *iṣṭa*, and have attained him by chanting his name with firm faith and devotion. In the medieval bhakti period, a number of Vaishnava saints—like Haridas, the great musician, and Surdas, the celebrated poet—achieved the ultimate goal of their lives through exclusive devotion to Krishna. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu—who is considered a dual incarnation of Krishna and Radha—Vallabhacharya, and others spread the message of devotion to Krishna far and wide. Chaitanya's message of divine love helped break the social barriers of his time. Among his followers were not only Hindus of different castes and social standing, but also Muslims, of whom Haridas is particularly well known.

In more recent times, we have the example of Aghoramani Devi, a devotee of Ramakrishna who attained the vision of Krishna through the repetition of his name and intense devotion to him. Popularly known as Gopal-ma—Gopala's Mother—Aghoramani was a child widow who lived most of her life at a temple dedicated to Radha and Krishna at Kamarhati, near Dakshineswar. She was poor and illiterate but had intense devotion to Gopala—the baby Krishna. Through regular japa of the Gopala mantra, year after year, she had numerous visions of Gopala and ultimately the vision of the universal form of Krishna—a very rare experience. Swami Saradananda records:

When the Master passed away, Gopal-ma's grief knew no bounds. For a long time she did not leave Kamarhati to go anywhere. She lived alone in seclusion. After a while, when she began to have visions of the Master as before, her grief came to an end. ... Once she attended the Chariot Festival at Mahesh, across the Ganges, and was overwhelmed with joy as she saw Gopala in all living beings and in everything else. She said that she saw her beloved Gopala in the chariot, in the image of the Lord Jagannath in the chariot, in those who were pulling the chariot, and in the vast crowd—her

beloved Gopala had become manifest in different forms. She was beside herself with joy at this cosmic vision of God and lost outer consciousness of her surroundings in ecstasy. Gopal-ma described this vision to a woman friend, saying: 'I was not myself. I danced and laughed and created quite a commotion.'⁸


Concluding his masterly essay on the philosophy of the Bhagavata, Swami Tyagisananda writes:

The philosophy of the *Bhāgavata* is intensely practical and affects all aspects of life. A thorough understanding of this philosophy can be had only by a study of the lives of the great philosophers presented in it. They come from all walks and stages of life, from all classes of society, from both sexes, and from all age-groups. But the greatest amongst them all is Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who, according to Swami Vivekananda, is the first great teacher in the history of the world to discover and proclaim the grand truths of love for love's sake and duty for duty's sake. Born in a prison, brought up by cowherds, subjected to all kinds of tyranny by the most despotic monarchy of the day, and derided by the orthodox, Kṛṣṇa still rose to be the greatest saint, philosopher, and reformer of his age. All the greatest sages and the most immaculate saints of his time pay him divine honours; they consider him the best and most perfect among the spiritual men of the age, and with one voice acclaim him as divinity manifest on earth, looking up to him for light and guidance. To them, he is not only a *vibhūti* (an especial divine manifestation), *vyūha* (the fourfold expression of Puruṣottama), *bhagavattama* or *avatāra*, but also the personal God and even absolute Reality. In him we find the ideal householder and the ideal *sannyāsin*, the hero of a thousand battles who knew no defeat, the terror of despots, sycophants, hypocrites, sophists, and pretenders, the master statesman, the uncrowned monarch, the king-maker who had no ambition for himself. He was a friend of the poor, the weak, the distressed, the champion of the rights of women and of the social and spiritual enfranchisement of the Śūdra and even of the untouchables, and the perfect ideal of detachment. In him, again, we find the perfect harmony of *jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *karma*—of head, heart, and hand.⁹

Madhusudana Saraswati, who, though a staunch advaitin, is also a great devotee of Krishna, salutes this amazing being:

*Vaṁśi-vibhūṣita-karāṇnavanīradābhāt
pītāmbarād-aruṇa-bimbaphalādharoṣṭhāt;
Pūrṇendu-sundara-mukhād-aravinda-netrāt-
kṣṇāt-param kimapi tattvam-aham na jāne.*

I know no reality other than Krishna whose hands are adorned with a flute, whose lustre resembles the new rain-cloud, who is dressed in yellow, whose lips are ruddy like the Bimba fruit, whose face is bright like the full moon, and who has lotus-like eyes.¹⁰

Innumerable devotees continue to echo the sentiments expressed by Madhusudana Saraswati to this day. 

References

1. See Bhagavata, 10.3.1-8.
2. See Swami Ranganathananda, *The Central Theme*

- of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2003), 10-11.
3. See Kamala Subramaniam, *Mahabharata* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2001), 380-1.
4. Swami Ranganathananda, *Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 2000), 12-13.
5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.438-9.
6. Bhagavadgita, 4.11.
7. *Complete Works*, 1.439.
8. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, trans. Swami Chetananda (St Louis: Vedanta Society, 2003), 699-700.
9. Swami Tyagisananda, 'Philosophy of the Bhāgavata', in *The Philosophies*, ed. Haridas Bhattacharyya, vol. 3 of *The Cultural Heritage of India* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1953), 298-9.
10. See Madhusudana Saraswati, *Bhagavad-Gita* with the annotation 'Gūḍhārtha Dīpikā', trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1998), 802.

Dharma at stake



Bhishma: A Model of Heroism

Swami Tathagatananda

ONLY a great spiritual being can guide human life to perfection. The full personality of one who has risen above human limitations while living in the world is expressed in the ancient Hindu ideal of the rishi. Such a being can be found in the person of Bhishma, the peerless son of Shantanu and Ganga, the great grandsire of the Pandava and Kaurava clans, immortalized in the Mahabharata. In the glorious life of Bhishma, thoughtful individuals will find the prototype of the true Indian hero. In the twin realms of thought and action, Bhishma is unquestionably a supreme manifestation, the embodiment of the highest aspirations of Hindu culture. The combined wisdom of balance, serenity, and chivalry, unified in his character, makes him a great exemplar of Hindu spiritual culture.

A study of Bhishma's life in its entirety is not within the scope of this article. Nevertheless, even brief details of his illustrious life reveal his inner spiritual endowments, which are projected in his bold and meaningful actions. Upon the dull background of ordinary human existence, the character of Bhishma appears in lustrous relief. Bhishma is the eternal heroic ideal, ever shining in a world of darkness and ignorance.

Purity and Uprightness

Purity is inseparable from the Hindu concept of dharma, the sum of all our righteous relations to nature, humanity, and God. Through dharma we are bound to one another and to God. It is a bond of duty that is cemented with love. Purity and spiritual love bind us to righteous thoughts and actions.

The most noteworthy elements in Bhishma's character are his love of purity and dharma. His fulfilment of the vow of chastity is without prece-

dent. Purity possessed him—it was his sole passion, the mystical bride of his soul. He was equally dedicated in his love of dharma.

On no occasion did Bhishma swerve from the narrow path of virtue that leads to eternal happiness. His loyalty to the throne is an eternal paradigm of righteous fidelity for all thoughtful citizens. He guided the fortunes of the state of Hastinapura under the most trying circumstances, when it was without a king and when it was ruled by a physically and morally blind king.

Bhishma well understood that patriotism is a noble virtue. Loyalty is the seed of social and political stability of a nation. He fought for his king until the last atom of strength was gone from his body. Though Bhishma did not have the benefit of serving a righteous king, his loyalty to the Crown never came into conflict with his loyalty to God. His conscience and discrimination were purified by his devotion to righteousness.

Bhishma's father had granted him a treasured boon. 'I grant you a boon. You can hold death at arm's length. You can die when you please.' After a long life of righteous action and purity in every aspect of his illustrious career, Bhishma delayed his death until the end of the Kurukshetra War. Throughout the battle, Bhishma gave his inner blessing to the virtuous Pandava brothers and told them they would attain victory over the Kauravas. Although he was obliged to fight on the side of the Kauravas, his heart was with the Pandavas because theirs was a righteous cause.

The Ethical Warrior

The code of ethics for war in those bygone days was incomparably superior to the way that wars are administered and fought today. Firstly, both

sides in the conflict had to be equal in strength and forces. They both agreed to follow the ethical rules of war and chivalry. The rules dictated that the battle should be fought by representatives of the two armies—between two archers or two chariots. If one warrior withdrew, the other had to withdraw as well, without harassing his opponent. Wars could be fought not only with weapons, they could be waged with words too. If such was the case, neither opponent could use weapons. If cowards emerged in the fight, they were not killed as they ran from the battle in fear of their lives. The fearful and the unprepared soldier could not be attacked. All those who served the warriors or the battle in any capacity except as soldier—the flag-bearers, the cymbal and drum-holders, for example—could not be attacked. The war was to be fought in the daylight hours after which both armies would retreat to rest and dress their wounds. During the evening hours, the opponents became friends for the time being and abandoned their enmity. They visited each other's camps to discuss the battle and other matters in a normal manner. War was righteous for a kshatriya, but a righteous war could not be motivated by hate or revenge. It could only be motivated by righteousness—war in the interest of righting a wrong.

Respectful to these ethical rules of war, Bhishma had blessed the Pandavas and assured them of victory. He said to them, 'Where there is dharma, there is victory and you will be victorious.' Bhishma's heart was with the Pandavas, who were righteous. His compassion, magnanimity, and willing self-sacrifice have a singular distinction and signify his moral eminence.

Bhishma had sworn to Duryodhana that he would kill ten thousand valiant warriors of the Pandava army every day. But he also told Duryodhana that he would not kill the Pandavas and would offer them advice about their welfare. By the tenth day of the Kurukshetra War Bhishma had decimated large portions of the Pandava army which left the latter in deep despair. Not knowing what else to do, the Pandavas approached Bhishma and asked him

how he could be defeated. Bhishma knew that the Pandavas must emerge victorious, as theirs was a righteous cause. He told them to place Shikhandi at the head of the army when they went to battle in the morning. And Arjuna could position himself behind Shikhandi and fight with him.

In keeping with the ethical code of war, Bhishma had resolved he would never fight with a woman or a eunuch. They were both considered to be weaker than other warriors and at a disadvantage in war; therefore, fighting against them was considered unrighteous. Shikhandi, fighting on the side of the Pandavas in the great Kurukshetra War, was a transgendered person. Besides, he had been a woman in his previous life. Bhishma had repeatedly avoided fighting with Shikhandi on the battlefield. He preferred death to the breaking of his noble vow.

Faced with Shikhandi and overwhelmed by the horrible toll of the war on both sides, Bhishma was overcome with guilt and repulsed by the war. He felt that he was the cause of the destruction of the noble kshatriyas, what to speak of his own relatives on both sides. At this point, he said to himself, 'I can die when I please. I have decided. I want to die. I will welcome death now, at this very moment.' His intuition affirmed this thought to be correct. Thus it came to pass that at the appropriate moment Bhishma was struck by a shower of Arjuna's arrows and fell from his chariot. Bhishma, who delayed his death by his own will, now waited for the auspicious time, when the sun turns northward, to depart from the world.

Krishna referred to Bhishma's military genius in the 'Shanti Parva' of the Mahabharata: 'We have never heard of another like you—merciful, pure, self-controlled, seeking the welfare of all, and supreme in military skill. Ferocity and brute force and terror-inspiring cruelty are not real elements of military prowess at all. They belong to the law of the jungle and not to the realm of humanity.' Perhaps his most heroic trait is the love of purity, truth, and righteousness that compelled him to reveal to Yudhishtira at the proper time during the battle the means by which he could be disabled.

Following Bhishma's advice, the Pandavas defeated the invincible warrior and leader of the Kauravas.

Bhishma's self-denial is even more remarkable than his self-realization. He had faced every event in his life with equanimity, discrimination, and dispassion. He was unaffected by the opposing emotions of elation and humiliation. He was one of the greatest soldier-generals of all time. Moreover, he was one of the noblest, purest, and most compassionate chivalrous warriors the world has known.

The Statesman

Bhishma was adept in the science and art of governance for the good of the people and for establishing and propagating dharma, artha, and kama through righteous chastisement, *dandaniti*. The quintessence of human wisdom regarding civil authority is found in the 'Shanti Parva' and 'Anushasana Parva' of the Mahabharata. In these sections of the epic, Bhishma's description of the essentials of statesmanship comprises one of the finest portions of this sacred text. Bhishma taught that a righteous government is the root of all national and individual virtue. While Bhishma did not advocate the use of a popular vote, he emphasized that the popular will be ascertained in important matters of state. It was Bhishma's conviction that political wisdom matured with age, that pure living, experience, and learning led to sound judgement; and these were more valuable than the ephemeral effects of franchise, which might be exposed to corrupt practices.

His thoughts on statesmanship were expressed in the teachings he gave Yudhishtira while waiting for death on his bed of arrows. His devotion to Krishna brought the Lord to him during his last days. To encourage Bhishma as he lay in the throes of unendurable pain, Krishna told him: 'Bhishma, you have sixty-five days more left to live in this world. I will be by your side when you give up this bondage to reach your home. When you go, all that immense knowledge will go with you and no one will be able to get it. I want you to talk to Yudhishtira about all that you know. You can do it. You must now inspire Yudhishtira who is

grieved because he was the cause of the death of his cousins. He has been pacified by Vyasa himself, and he wants to rule the kingdom as well as his ancestors did. You must make him shake off this sorrow and rule the kingdom properly. You are the only person who can help him.'

Then Krishna gave Bhishma a special boon: 'I will grant you a boon. This pain and this weakness will not be there till you die. Your memory will be unclouded. Your perception will be as keen as the blade of a sword. You will be able to unravel the most intricate knots of the mysteries of the universe. You will know all that there is to know.' Whereupon Krishna removed all of Bhishma's pain and distress, so that his faithful devotee might perform his final duty to him.

Still, Bhishma wanted to know the reason why Krishna asked him to impart this knowledge, since Krishna was the embodiment of all knowledge and could have done it himself. Krishna told Bhishma that though he could give these teachings to Yudhishtira, he wanted Bhishma's name and righteousness to be remembered forever. 'Your utterances will be on a par with the Vedas and will bring undying glory to you. So speak on.'

Bhishma could only marvel at the mysterious ways of the Divine. His spiritual radiance and teachings cast a spell all around as he imparted his knowledge to Yudhishtira from his bed of arrows. All he then did was in accordance with Krishna's sublime command.

Bhishma's very first action was to bless Yudhishtira. He consoled and renewed his drooping, guilt-laden spirit with the sweetest tenderness: 'My child, the duty of a kshatriya is to fight and kill. You had to kill. You have been a real kshatriya. You must not grieve for having done your duty.' Bhishma's great compassion relieved Yudhishtira of his guilty conscience regarding all the sins of commission and omission on the part of the Pandavas. Then the humble Yudhishtira received from Bhishma's lips all his knowledge. Bhishma's concise teachings on the highest science of ruling a kingdom fully satisfied Yudhishtira.

Bhishma's lengthy illuminating discourse highlighted the necessity of a king's devotion to God, to truth, to behaviour that is above reproach, to straightforwardness and firmness combined with compassion. He taught Yudhishtira how to guard his own safety as well as the safety of his subjects, to conceal his innermost thoughts and place implicit confidence in himself alone, and to surround himself with like-minded noble persons in his court. He spoke to him of pleasantness in speech, purity of action, and proficiency in all matters related to the kingdom and its service to the people. He spoke to him about every aspect of dharma: Destiny is powerful, but self-effort can modify it. Truth is all-powerful. One who adheres to truth can never fail in life. One should practise self-control, humility, and righteousness. One should be neither too soft nor too stern. One should be able to adjust to the circumstances. Weakness is not a virtue and it breeds many evils. Compassion should be combined with stern discipline. Tolerance of irregularity and adharma leads to downfall. Life rusts in indolence; it shines in industry. Hatred is the most terrible poison. Love is the one constructive force and is all-powerful. It can reclaim even a sinner. Dharma is one's only friend, for it follows the body that has been abandoned by all.

Finally, Bhishma told Yudhishtira how to transcend all sorrow by meditating on God and all his glories. Bhishma left his body at the auspicious time, of his own will. Krishna told him, 'Death is waiting at your doorstep, waiting like a servant for your summons. You have my permission to summon him.'

The Philosopher

The extent of Bhishma's greatness is manifest in his wisdom and saintly life which relate to the highest verities of existence. The whole of 'Anushasana Parva' is devoted to an exposition of the vital aspects of ethical life. In Indian thought, the purity of individual ethics forms the spiritual edifice of social life. Without this foundation, the welfare of entire nations tumbles down like a house of cards, as history repeatedly demonstrates.

Lakshmi's declaration in the 'Anushasana Parva' contains the quintessence of practical thinking and wisdom, as it relates to the individual and social welfare of a nation. Lakshmi dwells as the goddess of happiness in the hearts of pious, merciful, vigorous, and self-controlled people. Lakshmi scorns the idle, licentious, and impure.

Yudhishtira asked Bhishma a very important question: What should one who seeks auspiciousness in life do during the journey of life? Bhishma gives his glorious reply: He must have deep faith in God. He must be full of purity and devoted to meditation. In his social relations he must avoid three things: cruelty, theft, and immorality. In his speech he must avoid four things: improper talk, cruel speech, talebearing, and lying. In his mental relations he must realize three assets: exclusion of thought about others' affluence, friendliness to all beings, and a strong conviction of the truth that 'as we sow so we reap'.

Individual ethical life forms the foundation of the sovereign edifice of enriched social life. Bhishma laid stress on what he called our common duties. They include, among others, compassion, truth, purity, passionlessness, detachment, and honesty. His exposition of the four ashramas reveals his strong emphasis on our ascent to the highest state of spiritual realization through study, service, meditation, and renunciation. Krishna praised Bhishma's wisdom, goodness, and devotion when he said to him, 'There is none like you. You have been purity itself. Your wisdom is unmatched among men.'

The cherished crown of the fullness of knowledge so abundant in Bhishma is God-realization. Krishna granted him spiritual victory and everlasting fame. It was Bhishma's reward for his immaculate, intuitive, and unwavering spirituality—which dwelled in him as an ever-present radiance, an ever-kindled rapture. When Bhishma departed from the world in majestic splendour, Krishna's prediction about the impact of his glorious personality was verified: 'After the demise of this supreme soldier, saint, and sage, the world will be like a dark, moonless night.'



Kunti: Nobility, Fortitude, and Sacrifice

Swami Tattwasarananda

WHEN the queen mother Vidula saw King Sanjaya lying in his inner apartments shedding tears, following his defeat at the hands of the king of Sindhu-desha, she was enraged. Showing no sympathy for her cowardly son, she reproached him in no uncertain terms: ‘O unworthy son of mine, O enhancer of the delight of foes, I know not from what place you have come; you are no son of mine, nor of my husband. Do not disgrace yourself, do not remain satisfied with little, set your heart on your own welfare and do not be afraid. Get up, O coward! Do not take defeat lying down. Let not your enemies delight and your friends grieve over your fall. It is better to court death in plucking the fangs of a snake than die miserably like a dog. Fight bravely even at the risk of your life. It is far better to flare up even for a moment than go on smoking for ever. Let none born of royal blood be a mild ass. Son! Either show your valour or court the way to death. For, indifferent to your duties that you are, there is no need for you to live.’

After his embassy to the Kaurava court—a last-ditch effort on his part to secure an honourable reconciliation between the Kauravas and the Pandavas—had failed due to the intransigence of Duryodhana, Krishna asked Kunti, who was then staying with Vidura at Hastinapura, what message she had for her sons? It was then that Kunti asked Krishna to tell Yudhishtira the conversation that had transpired between Vidula and her son. She also said: ‘O Keshava, tell King Yudhishtira: “Do not act in a fruitless manner, like a reader of the Vedas incapable of catching their true import. You view virtue only in terms of the literal meaning of the Vedas. Take a look at the duties of your own order as enjoined by Brahma. That is not the conduct of a royal sage in which you now wish to abide. He that is afflicted by

weakness of heart and unsteadiness never obtains the merit born of cherishing one’s subjects with love. Sacrifice, charity, merit, bravery, subjects and children, largesse, might, and energy—these are what I always prayed for you. You are a kshatriya and therefore the protector of all who are in distress. You are to live by your prowess. Recover your share of the kingdom of which you have been deprived—by persuasion, or stratagem, or gift, or force, or diplomacy. That I, deprived of friends, should live on food supplied by others, even after having mothered you, the enhancer of the joy of friends—what can be a matter of greater grief?”’

A Chequered Life

Kunti’s is a story of nobility, fortitude, and sacrifice. Through her all-too-apparent humanity peers a human being who has a larger perspective on life, and who tries to realize those ideals on which tradition placed a high value. As Swami Siddhinathanda points out: ‘Kunti has an individuality of her own. There are smiles and inquisitiveness, joy and happiness in Kunti’s life. Dangers and calamities shadow it. Gratitude adorns it. She loved her sons more than herself and was ever anxious for their well-being. Courage and initiative, harshness and revenge, sadness and ambition, bitterness and doggedness add colour to that life. Humility, service of the elders, simplicity, serenity, and peace sustain that noble life.’

Daughter of the great Yadava king Sura, Kunti—or Pritha—is Krishna’s paternal aunt. She was adopted by Kuntibhoja, a cousin of Sura who was childless. That she was devoted to the service of the gods and guests while still a young girl is evidenced by the fact that even the irascible Durvasa was pleased with her service and taught her a mantra

that would enable her to have sons from any god that she wished to invoke.

Unfortunately, Kunti did not fully realize the implications of this boon, and overcome by curiosity she decided to invoke Surya, the Sun, with it. The mantra was, of course, potent and Surya appeared in person before her. The powerful mantra also ensured that she conceived by Surya. Unlike Parashara—who brought up his son Vyasa, born of Satyawati out of wedlock—Surya did not help Kunti care for the newborn son, Karna. For fear of public disgrace, Kunti set the child afloat in a basket on a river, praying with tears in her eyes as she did so:

*Svasti te'stvāntarikṣebhyaḥ pārthivebhyaśca putraka;
Divyebhyaścaiva bhūtebhyastathā toyacarāśca ye.
Śivāste santu panthāno mā ca te paripanthinaḥ.*

O child! May good befall you at the hands of all that inhabit the land, the waters, the sky, and the celestial regions. May all your paths be auspicious! May no one obstruct your way!

Karna was picked up and reared by the charioteer Adhiratha and his wife Radha. He grew up to be a brave warrior, an expert in archery, a man noted for his generosity, an ally of the Kauravas, and an arch enemy of the Pandavas. The sorrow of having had to part with her first son never left Kunti. After Karna had been killed in the Kurukshetra War, Kunti asked Yudhishtira to offer the traditional oblations in the Ganga for Karna, their eldest brother.

Kunti's marital life was also unusual. Having chosen Pandu as her husband in a *svayamvara* ceremony, she never had a child by Pandu. Her husband had received a curse from the sage Kimdama that he would die on having intercourse with his wife because he had shot the sage with an arrow when he was united with his wife in the guise of a deer. Deeply hurt by the turn of events, Pandu decided to retire into the forest and live the life of a renunciant. Kunti accompanied him and lived like an austere celibate for several years. Later, Pandu was worried about the continuance of his lineage and wanted Kunti to have children through the process of *niyoga*—by getting someone suitable to help her

bear a child. Kunti was averse to this idea, but when Pandu was insistent she used the mantra obtained from Durvasa to have three children—Yudhishtira from Dharma, Bhima from Vayu, and Arjuna from Indra. She also helped her co-wife Madri to have a pair of twins through the Ashwini-kumaras. Pandu wanted her to have more children, but Kunti would not consent, considering this dishonourable.

Not long after this, Pandu failed to restrain himself in the presence of Madri and died from Kimdama's curse. Following the practice of the day, Madri gave up her life on her husband's funeral pyre. Kunti too wanted to follow the same course, but had to abstain from doing so on the advice of some rishis, as she was needed to mother the five young Pandava princes. This duty she carried out right up to her ripe old age.

Kunti returned to Hastinapura with her five children to live under the care of Bhishma and Dhritarashtra. The following years were marked with a mixture of joys and sorrows for Kunti and the Pandavas. The joys of the palace that the Pandava children enjoyed while growing up under the watchful eyes of Bhishma were soon marred by the jealousy of the Kauravas. If they narrowly escaped a plot to have them burnt alive in a house of lac and managed to enjoy the glories of the newly founded city of Indraprastha, with its magical court created by Maya, Yudhishtira was soon lured into a game of dice with Duryodhana and Shakuni who conspired to defeat him with cunning and deceit. The brothers were forced to retire into the forest for twelve years and then live another year incognito. But the most tragic of all events, which eventually proved to be of crucial importance in sealing the fate of the Kauravas, was Duhshasana's dragging the proud Draupadi—whom Yudhishtira had pawned in the game of dice and lost—into the Kaurava court and attempting to disrobe her. Only the divine intervention of Krishna—who ensured that Draupadi's cloth did not run out even as Duhshasana kept pulling at it—saved Draupadi from total humiliation as, barring Vidura, virtually every member of the Kaurava court, including Bhishma, remained a silent witness to the tragedy.

Seeking a Just Requit

Neither Draupadi, nor Kunti—who considered her daughter-in-law to be more dear than her own sons—could forget or forgive this insult, and their hearts were always seeking requital. So, while addressing her children through Krishna, before the actual outbreak of war, she told Arjuna to ‘tread that path that Draupadi points out to you. The loss of kingdom did not grieve me; the defeat at dice did not grieve me. That the illustrious and beautiful princess of Panchala was dragged into the assembly while dressed in a single cloth and made to bear bitter words grieved me most. Alas, ever devoted to the kshatriya customs and endued with great beauty, the princess, while ill, underwent that cruel treatment, and though possessing powerful protectors was then as helpless as though she had none.’

But can such rage that ultimately resulted in a war that decimated virtually every single king and warrior of Bharata be considered justified? A close reading of Kunti’s reactions tells us that she was never really blinded by rage or behaved in a thoughtless or unreasonable fashion. She faced troubles bravely and she wanted her children to do the same. This is amply demonstrated in what she did while the Pandavas were living with a brahmana family at Ekachakrapur, after having escaped being burnt in the lac house at Varanavata. The village was terrorized by a demon whom the villagers had to provide with daily food; and his menu included a live human being. One day it was the turn of the brahmana family to supply the provisions. When the family was grieving over the impending loss of a member, Kunti pacified them and had Bhima take the provisions to the demon. Even Yudhishtira was apprehensive about this proposal, for they had no idea how strong the demon was. But Kunti was sure of Bhima’s strength. Besides, as she herself says: ‘I have resolved upon this course after due deliberation for the sake of duty and righteousness. By this act two objects will be accomplished: requital of our host’s generosity and the acquisition of high religious merit.’ Bhima gladly obeyed his mother and put the demon to death.

Not only is Kunti firm in her conviction about

rights and justice, she is also possessed of great devotion. When she expresses her sorrow over the plight of her homeless children to Krishna, who is visiting her at Vidura’s house in Hastinapura, the latter reassures her saying: ‘What woman is there, O aunt, in the whole world like you? The daughter of King Surasena, you are, by marriage, admitted into Ajamida’s race. High-born, and highly married, you are like a lotus transplanted from one mighty lake unto another. Endowed with every prosperity and great good fortune, you were adored by your husband. The wife of a hero, you have given birth to heroic sons. Possessed of every virtue and endowed with great wisdom that you are, it behoves you to bear with patience both happiness and misery. Having overcome sleep and languor, anger and mirth, hunger and thirst, and heat and cold, your children always enjoy the happiness that, as heroes, is their due. Possessed of great power and might, your sons always pursue that happiness which, as heroes, they should. You shall soon see them become the masters of the world.’

Kunti has full faith in Krishna’s words: ‘O Janardana, let that which you think is proper be done, without sacrificing righteousness and without the least guile. I know of your truthfulness and of your lineage. I also know what judgement and prowess you bring to bear upon the accomplishment of all that concerns your friends. You are the very self of virtue and truth and you are the embodiment of ascetic austerities. So, whatever you say must be true.’

Beyond Self-seeking

When Krishna’s embassy to the Kaurava court proved futile and Vidura expressed great concern about the inter-familial war, Kunti said to herself: ‘Fie on the wealth for the sake of which this great slaughter of kinsmen is about to take place. Indeed, in this war, they that are friends will sustain defeat. What can be greater grief than this, that the Pandavas, the Chedis, the Panchalas, and the Yadavas, assembled together, will fight the Bharatas. I see only demerit in war. On the one hand, if we do not fight, poverty and humiliation will be ours. On the other

hand, the extermination of kinsmen is not victory. As I think of this my heart overflows with sorrow.'

Kunti reflected over the balance of forces and felt that Bhishma and Drona, the main generals of the Kauravas, had no reason to hate the Pandavas. It was only Karna who was insistent on harming the Pandavas and was advising Duryodhana accordingly. So she decided to approach Karna, reveal the truth about his parentage, and dissuade him from siding with the Kauravas. If Karna were not to support him, Duryodhana was much less likely to insist on war. Unfortunately, Kunti had not reckoned with the depth of Karna's hatred towards the Pandavas. Not only did he refuse her proposal, he told her in no uncertain terms that she was a mere self-seeking woman, *kevala ātma-hitaiṣiṇī*, who had performed none of her motherly duties towards him. Of course, as a concession to her sentiments, he promised to kill none of the Pandavas in battle except Arjuna.

The Kurukshetra War is described as having resulted in the victory of dharma. But the price it exacted was overwhelming. Even the Pandavas lost their army and their sons. Kunti's own cup of sorrow was full though she tried bravely to see that family honour was upheld. When Dhritarashtra and Gandhari decided to take to *vānaprastha*, the third stage of life, in preparation for leaving this world, Kunti joined them. Her children were dumbfounded at her decision. Yudhishtira said: 'After goading us on for war with the story of Vidula, it is improper on your part to go away like this now. It was after hearing your message from Krishna that I embarked on this destructive war and won the kingdom. After advising us to stand by the duties of the kshatriyas, why are you now going away from them?' Bhima said: 'Why this decision, Mother, when you ought to be enjoying the riches that your sons have acquired? Why then did you make us ruin the land?'

Kunti was unmoved by these pleas: 'It is true, son, that I egged you on to fight for your rights when you were roaming about with empty stomachs and grief-laden hearts. Deprived of your rightful patrimony, insulted by your kinsmen, when you were living on the bread of beggary, I did goad you on to

fight for your rights. You ask me, why? In order that you may not wait on your inferiors, you who are veterans of war and are as noble as the gods. So that you, Yudhishtira, who are righteous and the rightful heir to the throne may not wander about in the woods. So that Bhima, who is far-famed for his prowess, may not suffer humiliation at the hands of his enemies. So that Arjuna, Indra's son, may not drink the cup of misery. So that your dear younger brothers Nakula and Sahadeva may not know the pinch of poverty and hunger. So that Draupadi, this dear daughter of mine, may not fall prey again to vile molestation. My dear son, it was to rouse you to your own glory that I pushed you into war through the words of Vidula. I encouraged you to fight in order that the noble line of the great King Pandu may not come to an end with my sons. There is no hope or future for one who brings about the ruin of one's family. My children, I have enjoyed in full all the royal pleasures which my departed husband had earned for me. Charities without number have I performed. And I have sipped the soma juice in solemn sacrifice. I do not crave for any enjoyment earned by my sons. I intend reducing my body through penance and service to my elders. May your mind ever remain steadfast in righteousness; may your mind be noble: *Dharme te dhīyatām buddhir-manas-te mahad-astu ca*.'

Steadfastness in dharma—this is the keynote of Kunti's life. *Dharma* or righteousness, *tyāga* or renunciation, *kṣamā* or forgiveness, and *sevā* or service are four eternal ideals of the Indian civilization. And all these were manifest in Kunti's life. In the Mahabharata we see Krishna, Bhishma, and Vidura calling Kunti *prajñāvatī*, a woman of wisdom, *mahāprajña*, endowed with great wisdom, and *manasvinī*, a reflective mind. In the 'Adi Parva' of the Mahabharata Vyasa elaborates upon two great qualities of Kunti—her patience and perseverance in every situation and her unique attitude of *seva*. And as though befitting this sacrificial nature of her life, her body was finally consumed in a forest fire as she was on her way to the hermitage after a bath in the Ganga. Kunti met this fire as nobly as she did the other fires that tried to singe her all too often in her chequered life. ❧

Narada: The Sage Celestial

Swami Purnananda

WHAT would you feel if you were asked the question: How did you die? You would perhaps be bemused for a while and then feel convinced that your interlocutor was out of his head. But when Narada was asked this question by Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa he was not taken by surprise; nor did he feel uncomfortable. Instead, his face lit up with a radiant smile as he proceeded to answer this seemingly unanswerable question.

Counsellor to Vyasa

Once Vyasa was lamenting over the great dissatisfaction and unrest that was tormenting his mind even though he was well versed in the Vedas, had lived in consonance with dharma, and devoted himself to the welfare of all beings. He sat on the banks of River Saraswati cogitating on the cause of the depressive thoughts that were constantly weighing on his mind. Just then Narada happened to arrive at Vyasa's ashrama in the course of his perpetual peregrination across the three worlds. Though he was received with due respect, Narada realized that Vyasa was disturbed. So after praising him for his many achievements, he enquired after his well-being:

*Jijñāsitam-adbhutam ca yat-tat-brahma sanātanam;
Athāpi śocasyaṭmānam-akṛtārtha iva prabho.*

O master of oneself, you have realized the eternal Brahman by the process of proper discrimination; why then do you look mentally troubled, as though possessed by a sense of futility.¹

Vyasa replied: 'I am aware that I have the excellences you mention; yet I have no peace of mind. I feel dissatisfied. I think I have some shortcoming, which I am unable to make out. You are a man of wisdom, the son of the Creator, and a beloved devotee of the Lord. You travel all over the three

worlds and can penetrate into everything. You know the thoughts of every being. Be kind, I pray, and tell me the causes of my dysphoria.'

Narada pointed out the reason for Vyasa's distress in a succinct reply: 'You have not adequately described the unblemished glory of the Supreme Lord in your works. That is why he is not pleased with you. And for that reason, I reckon, your knowledge is incomplete.' After elaborating upon his statement, he advised Vyasa to recall the divine play of the Lord by means of samadhi (and describe it) for liberation from all worldly bonds: *urukramasyākhila-bandha-muktaye samādhinānusmara tad-vicēṣṭitam* (1.5.13).

The Housemaid's Son

While dwelling on the need for contemplating and expounding the glories of Bhagavan, Narada recalled one of his previous births as a housemaid's son: 'In one of my previous lives I was born of a housemaid who was engaged in a household of Vedic ritualists. I was appointed to serve the yogis who gathered at the place for *cāturmāsya*, retreat during the rainy season. Although impartial by nature, they were very gracious to me as I had engaged myself sincerely in their service. Moreover, I was self-restrained and devoid of childish frivolity. I was also obedient, reserved, and not fond of sports or games like other children. Having obtained their consent, I once partook a little of the remains of their meal. That was enough to free me from all past sin. With my mind thus purified, I felt greatly inclined to listen to the divine glories of the Lord that the sages were always engaged in singing. Gradually I developed an irresistible attraction for the Divine. My mind became steady in its devotion to the Lord and I could realize that my gross and subtle bodies, born of ignorance, were superimpos-

itions on my real Self, the Atman. Thus, by hearing continuously the glories of the Lord from these great souls, throughout the rainy season and autumn, there arose in my heart that devotion which destroys *rajas* and *tamas*. As they were leaving, the kind and compassionate sages instructed me in the transcendental spiritual truths that are revealed by the Lord himself, for though a mere child, I was devoted, humble, guileless, respectful, restrained, and obedient by nature. By means of this knowledge I could realize the influence of *maya*, the power of the Lord; and this knowledge leads one to divine beatitude. So I also attained this state and became one of the *pārśadas*, immediate associates, of the Lord.

Vyasa's curiosity was aroused by this remarkable story. He wanted to know more about the housemaid's son, and his questions included the following: '*Katham cedam-udasrākṣiḥ kāle prāpte kalevaram*; in the end, how did you give up that mortal frame of yours?' (1.6.3). Narada replied: 'I was the only son of my mother. Though she was deeply attached to me, being but a mere housemaid, she was hardly capable of properly looking after me. All beings are under the control of Providence, much like puppets in the hands of a puppeteer. I was still a mere boy when my poor mother was fatally bitten by a venomous snake while on her way to milk a cow. Taking this to be a blessing (in disguise) for my welfare, I left home and started walking north, surrendering myself to the divine Will. Passing through towns, villages, farms, and mines; through groves, jungles, and forests; and by the side of lakes filled with lotuses, at last I reached a dense and forbidding forest. Hungry, thirsty, and tired, I refreshed myself by bathing and drinking at a forest stream. Sitting under a pipal tree in that remote and desolate forest, I started meditating upon the Supreme Being immanent in oneself, as instructed by the sages. As I meditated on the lotus feet of the Lord, with a mind filled with devotion, and eyes brimming with tears due to the intensity of aspiration, my beloved Lord appeared in my heart. O Vyasa! How can I express the joy I experienced! With my hair standing on end in ecstasy, I was lost in an ocean of divine bliss. But

alas! The vision disappeared and I could no more see that pleasing divine form that destroys all sorrow. I was utterly upset; I got up from the seat with a distressed mind. I tried again to dive deep into my mind and search for the divine form, but all effort proved futile. Deprived of the vision of the Lord, I became filled with frustration and anguish.

Just then, as if to assuage my grief, the Lord spoke to me in a deep, sweet voice: "My boy! Lament not, you shall not have any further vision of me. To those who are not established in yoga, whose minds are smeared with the taint of worldliness, I remain invisible. O taintless one! You have had my rare vision once, and this I bestowed to enhance your yearning for me. With the increase in right yearning, my devotees gradually give up all desires lodged in their minds and become pure; and only those that are pure in heart can have my constant vision. Through service to pure souls—even though it was only for a short while—you have developed unflinching devotion towards me. You will give up this mortal frame of yours within a short time and have the rare privilege of being one of my *pārśadas*. Moreover, your devotion to me will never be diminished and your recollection of me will not be affected by Creation or Dissolution."

That formless Elysian voice which had assumed a spatial form, as it were, in my heart ceased to be heard thereafter. I bowed my head in salutation to that Noble Being. Repeating the auspicious names of the Lord, the Infinite Being, and recollecting his sacred and mysterious acts, I became contented in mind—devoid of attachment and shame, and free from egotism and malice. Waiting eagerly for the time of my being directly associated with the Lord, I kept wandering across the globe. For me, who was intensely devoted to the Lord, pure in heart, and totally detached from all mundane objects, the moment of departure arrived suddenly like a flash of lightning. The sacred and pure godly body, *bhāgavatī tanu*, made of pure *sattva* and fit for the service of the Lord, was generated in me even as my mortal body born of the five elements dropped away on exhaustion of its past karma.

‘At the end of the cosmic cycle, when all creation was withdrawn into the causal state and the Supreme Being lay resting on the causal waters, *kāraṇa salila*, I too entered his divine body along with Brahma, his creative breath. After a thousand divine aeons, when the Lord again resolved to create this world, I was born of his vital breath along with such rishis as Marichi and Atri. Committed to celibacy, I have been roaming the three worlds unhindered, by the grace of the Lord, chanting the divine name “Hari”, striking melodious notes on the strings of the vina that the Lord has himself given me. When I sing his glories to the accompaniment of the celestial lute, the Supreme Lord of endearing fame and sanctifying feet appears in my heart, as if promptly responding to a call by one’s name. This is the story of my death and birth, which you wanted to know.’²

We learn from this story that Narada had descended directly from Brahma, the Creator. At the beginning of every cosmic cycle, Narada accepts a gross body, and at the time of cosmic dissolution he merges into the Lord. He never loses the memory of his birth and disappearance in each cycle. Sri Ramakrishna pointed out that Narada is a *nitya jiva*, an ever free, eternally perfect being. Being a direct associate of the Lord, he is a free soul, never caught in the clutches of maya. Having broken the fetters of karma, he has gone beyond the bondage of birth and death as well as the other miseries of the world.

Seeker of Self-knowledge

The cosmic dimensions of Narada’s life make it very difficult for us to reconstruct his life history. He was, of course, a very famous sage even at the time the *Aitareya Brahmana* was recorded. He is widely recognized as a fascinating, albeit difficult-to-understand, personality. Narada is a man of wisdom. Yet in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* we find him approaching the sage Sanatkumara for spiritual instruction. Sanatkumara, one among the first four sannyasins, was a sibling to Narada, having been born of Brahma. When Narada requested

Sanatkumara to teach him, Sanatkumara said: ‘Tell me what you already know, and I shall teach you what is beyond that.’ Narada replied with a long list: ‘I have studied the Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, and Atharva Veda the fourth; Itihasas and Puranas—history and mythology—which are the fifth Veda; Vyakarana, by means of which the meaning of the Vedas is understood; the rites for manes, mathematics, natural science, mineralogy, logic, ethics, etymology, science of rituals, material sciences, the science of warfare, astrology, herpetology, and the fine arts—I know all this. But, O venerable sir, even after this vast study I am only a *mantravit*, knower of texts, not an *ātmavit*, knower of the Atman. I have learnt from persons of wisdom like you that the knower of the Atman alone can cross the ocean of misery; and I am afflicted with misery. Therefore, my Lord, rescue me from this ocean of misery.’³

Sanatkumara did impart the knowledge of Brahman to Narada. But what interests us here is the wide range of Narada’s study and the vast repertoire of skills he commanded. The irony is that despite possessing such vast knowledge—virtually impossible for any one human being to attain in a lifetime—Narada lacked peace of mind. That is why he came to Sanatkumara seeking the knowledge of the Self, for this knowledge can give peace of mind. Self-knowledge or the knowledge of Brahman is called *parāvidyā*, supreme knowledge, and all else is inferior knowledge, *aparāvidyā*. As Sri Ramakrishna has said, ‘That alone is Knowledge through which one is able to know God. All else is futile.’⁴

Secular knowledge has its own value. Hence the *Chhandogya Upanishad* speaks of two types of knowledge, *dve vidye*, the *parā* and the *aparā*. But Narada’s experience reminds us that peace of mind or genuine contentment and happiness cannot be had without the knowledge of God. Narada had realized this truth; therefore he could tell Vyasa to describe the divine play and glory of the Lord, listening to which would arouse unflinching devotion to God in human hearts. And such devotion brings lasting peace and bliss.

An Enigma

His wisdom notwithstanding, there are times when Narada behaves like any common person, at times even like an ignorant one. This lends his character its intriguing aura. Here is one such instance: Once Narada became a little proud of his musical abilities—that none could play the vina as well as he did. Bhagavan Vishnu came to know this and thought: ‘My devotees should not be boastful. So Narada ought to be taught a lesson.’ He took Narada for a walk into a forest. Suddenly they heard someone weeping. On following the sound they found some women with badly deformed bodies crying in pain. Vishnu asked them who they were and why they were weeping. The women replied: ‘We are the Raginis, the deities of music. Our bodies have been disfigured by Narada’s erroneous selection of notes. He is tone-deaf and has little musical sense. His singing is out of tune with his music, and this has disfigured us.’ Narada was humbled.

On the face of it, many of Narada’s actions and endeavours appear strange and meaningless; but deep meaning underlies each of them. He is intelligent and wise, a good counsellor and a great devotee of the Lord. He wishes all beings well. He has no enemies. He can visit anybody, anywhere and at any time, irrespective of their social standing—whether they be gods, demons, or human beings—for he is a sincere counsellor. All the same, his intrusions do look awkward at times.

On hearing a celestial voice warning him that he would meet his death at the hands of the eighth issue of his cousin Devaki, Kamsa, the wicked ruler of Mathura, decided to kill Devaki. Devaki’s husband Vasudeva managed to save her life by promising to hand over all their children to Kamsa. When

their first son Kirtiman was born, Vasudeva took the baby to Kamsa with a heavy heart in order to keep his promise. Kamsa was pleased by Vasudeva’s strict adherence to truth and his even-mindedness towards friend and foe. He said to Vasudeva:

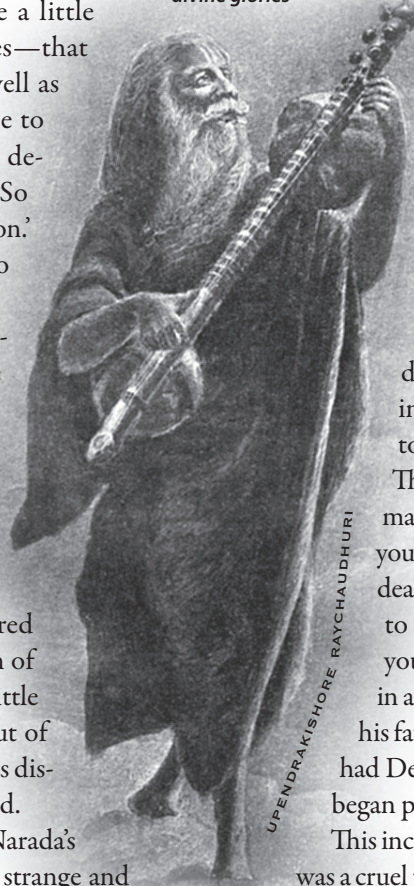
‘O Vasudeva, take this child back with you, I have no cause to fear him; it is only by your eighth child that I am destined to die.’

No sooner did Vasudeva leave Kamsa’s palace than Narada arrived on the scene. He told Kamsa: ‘Did you know that Nanda and the other men and women of Vraja, as well as those of the Yadava clan, are all gods and goddesses in human forms? Once I happened to be there at a meeting of the gods. There I came to know that they were making plans to kill you along with all your relatives and followers. You are very dear to me; so, as a well-wisher, I came to inform you. Now you do whatever you think proper.’ Kamsa was prompt in acting on Narada’s words. He deposed his father Ugrasena and assumed kingship, had Devaki and Vasudeva imprisoned, and began persecuting the Yadavas.

This incident would convince us that Narada was a cruel person, given to provoking ill-feeling and quarrel. That is why he is often called a *pisuna*—a slanderer, given to backbiting. But Narada is endowed with a vision and memory that is far deeper than that of an ordinary person. So he is able to act in harmony with imperceptible divine plans, and his actions have a subtle and mysterious quality.

In this case, Kirtiman and the other children of Vasudeva were the presiding deities of the eight quarters of the globe. They had to take human birth as a result of Brahma’s curse. They were to regain their godly states only after their human bodies were destroyed by their maternal uncle. Moreover, only when adharma, lawlessness, reaches a climax, and the devotees of the Lord start suffering torture,

Singing
divine glories



UPENDRAKISHORE RAYCHAUDHURI

does Bhagavan appear on earth to protect his devotees by destroying the perpetrators of adharma. So, Narada was only being a voluntary participant in the cosmic drama. Similar altruistic motives may also be discovered in other acts of Narada.

A Man of Knowledge and a Teacher

Nothing in the three worlds is beyond Narada's ken. In Vedic passages we see him performing yajnas on behalf of kings. Once Valmiki asked Narada if he knew of any person who was perfect in every respect, and if such perfection was at all humanly possible. Narada told him of Ramachandra and also narrated the story of his entire life. This helped Valmiki pen the epic Ramayana.

We also find Narada present in Yudhishtira's court at Indraprastha, describing the secret behind the birth of the terrible demons Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu, which is 'impossible even for the gods to know'. Kayadhu, mother of the great devotee Prahlada was provided shelter by Narada in his ashrama while she was expecting. Narada would tell Kayadhu the mysteries of religion, the distinction between Self and non-Self, as well as the essentials of true devotion. The teachings were also for Prahlada, who was still in his mother's womb:

*Rsih kārūṇikastasyāḥ
prādād-ubhayam-īśvaraḥ;
Dharmasya tattvaṁ jñānam ca
mām-apyuddiśya nirmalam.*

Having me [Prahlada] also in mind, the merciful sage of great spiritual power imparted to her instructions regarding the flawless path of devotion and the enlightenment conveyed by it.⁵

Later, Prahlada also recalled that 'owing to the blessings of the sage, those teachings have ever remained fresh in my memory; *ṛṣinānugrhitam mām nādhunāpyajahāt smṛtiḥ*' (7.7.16).

Narada is also the preceptor of another famous devotee: Dhruva. When he was denied the right to sit on his father's lap by his stepmother Suruchi, Dhruva rushed back to his mother Suniti in tears. Poor Suniti was not a favourite with the king, and

all that she could say by way of consolation to Dhruva was this: '*Ārādhayādhoḥṣaja-pāda-padman yadicchase'dhyāsanam-uttamo yathā*; if you wish to sit (on your father's lap) like Uttama (your stepbrother), then worship the lotus feet of Vishnu' (4.8.19).

Dhruva took his mother's advice seriously and controlling his mind left his father's palace in search of Vishnu. Narada, omniscient that he is, came to know of Dhruva's leaving home. He met him on the way and tried to dissuade him from undertaking all the austerity needed to secure the grace of Vishnu saying: 'Happiness and unhappiness are due to one's past karma, so one should remain satisfied with one's fate; one should not feel jealous of persons with superior qualities; it is difficult to serve and propitiate the Lord, you can undertake all the necessary spiritual practices once you come of age.' But far from being dissuaded, Dhruva sought Narada's help in his search for the Supreme Being:

*Padam tribhuvanotkr̥ṣṭam
jigīṣoḥ sādhu-vartma me;
Brūhyasmat-pitrbhir-brahman
anyair-apyanadhiṣṭitam.*

O great one! I desire to attain to that state which is the most excellent in the three worlds, and which has not been achieved by my forefathers or by anybody else. Please tell me the best way to achieve this (4.8.37).

Pleased with Dhruva's resolve, Narada initiated him with the mantra '*Om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya*', advised him to go to Madhuvana on the banks of the Yamuna 'where Hari's presence is palpable at all times', and also instructed him how to undertake contemplation, worship, and other spiritual practices. Equipped with Narada's instructions, Dhruva undertook intense tapas and was soon blessed with a vision of the Divine.

Counsellor to Yudhishtira and Krishna

When Yudhishtira occupied the throne at the magnificent new court constructed at Indraprastha by Maya, Narada decided to visit him. At Yudhishtira's request, Narada described to him the ex-

cellences of some famous celestial courts: those of Indra, the king of the gods; Yama, the god of death; Brahma, the grandsire; Kubera, the king of treasures; and Varuna, the lord of the waters. In the course of conversation, Narada also advised Yudhishtira on the science of politics, administration, diplomacy, and warfare. Narada's political counsels would appear remarkable even in our days of democracy and globalization.

Narada's is a multifaceted character that largely remains incomprehensible. All the same, Narada is loved by all. He is a beloved devotee of the Lord. He is the author of a number of texts like the *Narada Bhakti Sutra*, the *Narada Pancharatra*, and the *Narada Samhita*. Above all, Narada is a friend, philosopher, and guide to those who need help to find their way out of distressing situations. Even Krishna, the famous teacher of the Bhagavadgita, sought Narada's advice when his own kinsmen—the Yadavas, Vrishnis, Bhojas, and Andhakas—were causing him great worry through their unruly behaviour and persistent mutual quarrels. He expressed his anxiety to Narada: 'It is not proper to disclose one's secrets to a stupid friend, nor to fickle souls, even though they be learned. You are my beloved, and also a great friend. You have a sharp mind; so please tell me what I should do about my relatives who grind my heart with their cruel talk, even as one grinds sticks for fire.' Narada tells Krishna that this was a 'domestic problem'. Krishna helped his clansmen by getting them land and wealth; and this turned their heads. He could not possibly take these away without provoking bloodshed. 'Use then a weapon,' said Narada, 'that is not made of steel, that is very mild, and yet capable of piercing all hearts.' When Krishna inquired what that weapon was, Narada replied: 'The giving of food to the best of your ability, forgiveness, sincerity, mildness, and honouring those who deserve to be honoured—these constitute a powerful weapon not made of steel. Turn the hearts and minds of your kinsmen with soft words; for none who is not great and pure at heart, and backed by great achievements and reliable friends, can bear a heavy burden.'⁶

PURNACHANDRA SINHA



Seeking
to do good

Narada in Krishna's Eyes

Yudhishtira asked Bhishma, who was lying on the 'bed of arrows', to tell him about one 'who is dear to all, who gladdens all, and who is endued with all merit and accomplishment'. Bhishma recounted Krishna's words to Ugrasena, who wanted to know why everyone spoke so highly of Narada: 'Narada is as learned in the scriptures as he is noble in conduct; yet he is not proud or boastful. Anger, impudence, fear, and procrastination have left him for good. That is why he is adored by all. He never deviates from his word, overpowered by passion or greed; so he deserves worship. High honour is paid to him because he is a man of spiritual knowledge, and is energetic, forgiving, self-possessed, simple, truthful, intelligent, and modest. He is liked because he is austere, good-natured, eloquent, soft-spoken, decorous, pure, amiable, devoid of malice, and an expert in music. He always does good to others and so is untouched by sin. He never finds pleasure in other's misfortunes and secures his ends with the aid of scriptural wisdom and knowledge of past events; hence he is universally held in high regard. He seeks to overcome all worldly desires by

chanting the Vedas and attending to the Puranas. He is a great renouncer. He grants no special favours, nor does he despise anyone. He dispenses knowledge equally to all and speaks according to the temperament and needs of his listener, so his conversation is delightful. He is vastly learned, wise, free from passion, deceit, laziness, greed, and anger; hence he is venerated. He is a man of unflinching devotion. He has gone beyond delusion. He does not strive to achieve wealth or objects of passion. Though totally detached, he takes a keen interest in the affairs of the world. He observes the diversity of human thought and behaviour, but never speaks ill

of anybody. He always strives to reconcile people and does not indulge in self-praise. So he is honoured everywhere. He disregards no science, nor does he repudiate other faiths; but he lives by his own standards of morality. He never wastes a moment and is always a master of his own self. He has earned Self-knowledge through much labour, and he does not refrain from the practice of samadhi. He is not without sense of shame and is always open to instruction from others, if that would add to his perfection. Never does he divulge others' secrets, for his mind is always detached, his intellect firm, and his heart unmoved by gain or loss. Who

Narada's Political Counsels

Narada [to Yudhishtira]: 'Is the wealth that you earn spent on proper objects? Does your mind take pleasure in virtue? Are you enjoying the pleasures of life? Has your mind avoided sinking under their weight? ... Ever devoted to the good of all, conversant as you are with the timeliness of all things, do you pursue dharma, artha, kama, and moksha, dividing your time judiciously? ...

'The seven principal officers of your state—the governor of the citadel, the commander of the forces, the chief judge, the general in command of interior affairs, the chief priest, the chief physician, and the chief astrologer—have not, I hope, succumbed to the influence of your foes, nor have they, I hope, been idle in consequence of the wealth they have earned. They are, I hope, all obedient to you. Your counsels, I hope, are never divulged by your trusted spies, by yourself, or by your ministers. You ascertain, I hope, what your friends, enemies, and strangers are up to. Do you make peace and war at proper times? Do you observe neutrality towards strangers and persons who are neutral towards you? ... The victories of kings can be attributed to good counsels. Is your kingdom protected by ministers learned in the Shastras who keep their own counsel? ...

'Do you never let agriculturists out of your sight? Are they free of fear in approaching you? Do you execute your plans through people who are trusted, incorruptible, and possessed of practical experience? ... Are your forts filled with wealth, food, weapons, water, engines and instru-


ments, as also with engineers and bowmen? Even a single minister that is intelligent, brave, self-controlled, and possessed of wisdom and judgement, is capable of conferring the highest prosperity on a king or his son; do you have even one such minister? Do you try to know everything about the eighteen tirthas of your enemy and the fifteen of your own by means of three and three spies, all unacquainted with one another? Is the priest you honour possessed of humility and renown, born of noble lineage, and free from jealousy and illiberality? ... Have respectable servants been employed by you in offices that are respectable, indifferent ones in offices that are indifferent, and inferior ones in offices that are low? Have you appointed to high offices ministers that are guileless and of good conduct for generations and above the common run? Do you avoid oppressing people with cruel and severe punishments? ...

'Is the commander of your forces confident, brave, intelligent, patient, well-behaved, of good birth, devoted to you, and competent? Do you treat with consideration and regard the chief officers of your army that are skilled, forward[looking], well-behaved, and powerful? Do you give your troops the appointed rations and pay at the proper time? ... I hope no single person of unbridled passions is allowed to manage a number of concerns pertaining to the army? Is any of your servants who has accomplished well a particular business by employing a special ability disappointed in obtaining from you a little special regard, and an increase in food and pay? I hope you reward persons of learning, and humility, and skill in every kind of know-

would not make this paragon of virtue—efficient, holy, provident, and tactful—a beloved friend?⁷

It is small wonder, therefore, that the Bhagavata also eulogizes Narada:

*Aho devarṣir-dhanyo'yaṁ
yat-kīrtiṁ śārṅgadhanvanah;
Gāyan-mādyannidam tantryā
ramayatyāturam jagat.*

Blessed is this divine sage Narada! For singing the divine glories of the Lord to the accompaniment of his vina, he himself is ever inebriated with divine love, and he enlivens with joy the hearts of beings distressed by the woes of the world.⁸ 

References

1. Bhagavata, 1.5.4.
2. See Bhagavata, 1.5–6.
3. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 7.1.1–3.
4. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 368.
5. Bhagavata, 7.7.15.
6. Mahabharata, 'Shanti Parva', 81.
7. Mahabharata, 'Shanti Parva', 230; see also Swami Tyagisananda, *Aphorisms on the Gospel of Divine Love or Narada Bhakti Sutra* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1943), 27–30.
8. Bhagavata, 1.6.39.

ledge with gifts of wealth and honour proportionate to their qualifications? Do you support the wives and children of men who have given their lives for you and have been distressed on your account? Do you cherish with paternal affection the enemy that has been weakened or that seeks refuge in you, having been vanquished in battle? Are you equal to all, and can everyone approach you as if you were their father and mother? ...

'Is your expenditure always covered by a fourth, a third, or half of your income?—Do your accountants and clerks apprise you every day, in the forenoon, of your income and expenditure? Do you dismiss servants that are skilled in their jobs, popular, and devoted to your welfare for no fault of theirs? Do you employ in your business people that are thievish, or covetous, or minors, or women? Are the agriculturists in your kingdom contented? Are large tanks and lakes constructed all over your kingdom at proper distances so that agriculture is not exclusively dependent on showers from the heavens? Are agriculturists in your kingdom wanting in either seed or food? Do you grant generous loans [of seed] to the tillers? Are the four professions of agriculture, trade, cattle-rearing, and lending at interest carried on by honest men? Do the five brave and wise men, employed in the five offices of protecting the city, the citadel, the merchants, and the agriculturists, and of punishing criminals, always benefit your kingdom by working in unison? For the protection of your cities, have the villages been made like towns, and the hamlets and village outskirts like villages? Are all these entirely under your supervision and sway? Are thieves and robbers that

sack your towns pursued by your police over the even and uneven parts of your kingdom? ... I hope no well-behaved, pure-souled, and respected person is ever ruined and his life taken, on false charge or theft by ministers that are ignorant of the Shastras and acting out of greed. ...

'I hope, your ministers are never won over by bribes, nor do they wrongly decide disputes that arise between the rich and the poor. Do you keep yourself free from the fourteen vices of kings: atheism, untruthfulness, anger, in-caution, procrastination, avoidance of the wise, idleness, restlessness of mind, seeking counsel from only one person, seeking advice from people unacquainted with the economics of profit, abandonment of settled plans, divulgence of plans, non-accomplishment of projects, and action without reflection? ... Are merchants treated with consideration in your capital and kingdom; are they allowed to trade without being deceived? Do you always listen to instructions on dharma and artha from the elderly who are experienced in economics? ...

'Do you give regularly to the artisans and artists employed by you the materials needed for their works as well as their due wages? Do you examine their works, appreciate them before good men, and reward them, having shown them due respect? ... Acquainted with every duty, do you cherish like a father the blind, the dumb, the lame, the deformed, the friendless, and the ascetics that have no homes? Have you overcome these six evils: sleep, idleness, fear, anger, weakness of mind, and procrastination?'

—Adapted from Mahabharata, 'Sabha Parva', 5;
trans. Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Beyond Human Relationship

Dilip Dhopavkar

HUMAN relationship is an extremely important issue for every individual. We all know subliminally that good, congenial, and healthy relationship with others is a source of happiness and mental peace. In the fast-paced world of today, stress-free life is fast becoming a rarity. The enormous amount of stress that individuals have to live with is distorting healthy value systems and causing breakdown of families, physical illnesses like hypertension and diabetes, and a whole host of mental problems. In spite of knowing this we find ourselves incapable of maintaining our interpersonal relationships the way they ought to be. We read a lot of self-help books, consult psychotherapists, and attend lectures and seminars conducted by experts on values, only to find that the benefits of doing this do not percolate into our daily relationships. Our untrained inherent tendencies surface and act as switches triggering actions that vitiate our relationships. This generates nervousness and sometimes even cynicism. Many times, the 'other' is blamed for the cause of the disharmony in a relationship. The other individual, in turn, is under the spell of a similar triggering mechanism. This makes *rapprochement* even more difficult.

Very often we want the solution to this problem on our own terms and within our own framework. Anything beyond our limited self-created world is rejected and we tend to search for a solution that justifies our conduct. If such a solution is found, it can soothe us for the time being, but is usually not a lasting one. Frequent failures in ameliorating disrupted relationships can result in a cynical world view, a rigid and false opinion of the people around us. To understand the nature of human relationships we need to change our existing ways of thinking and accept higher frameworks with an open mind.

The Basis of Human Relationship

Imagine the relationship between two persons to be a flexible conduit made of rubber, with the two ends guarded by valves that allow flow of liquids both ways, in and out. The ends are controlled by the concerned individuals. The continuous exchange of desires, fears, and expectations are like liquids flowing through the conduit. If their flow is regulated with discrimination, the container will remain free from stress. But if there are sudden gushes, the pipe may be able to accommodate the shocks only for certain period before bursting. Even if the flow is disturbed only by mild outbursts, the impact of repeated small stresses will lead to fatigue and the container will age fast and finally give out. That is why we get to see apparently happy couples, married for a long time, suffering unhappy breaks in their relationship. More often than not, this happens because the relationship was based on adjustments rather than understanding. We cannot maintain the container in good working condition without paying attention to its fluid contents and the nature of their flow.

Psychoanalysts, self-help teachers, and related professionals, generally look for correction rather than transformation. It is like correcting myopic vision with glasses rather than transforming the eyeball itself. Correction of the vision with glasses is a palliative measure; correcting the corneal curvature through laser-assisted surgery is a more definitive solution as it frees one from dependence on external aids.

In our quest for healthy relationships it is important to understand our self-image. Our desires shape our self-image and our aspirations, in turn, are influenced by our self-image. Ordinarily a sweeper would not desire to own the mansion he is sweeping. His desire is limited to generous

allowances and a nice pay packet. If he desires to own the mansion, then his self-image is not that of a typical sweeper, but of an uncommonly ambitious person. If such a person does not know of the valid means for actualizing his ambitions or does not have the patience and energy to work out his ambitions, then he is likely to suffer mentally and also have problems in his interpersonal relations.

So we need to investigate the nature of the self-image. Only then can we shed our conventional thinking and discover fresh approaches to our relationships. An infant starts developing an idea of the 'I-self'—some sense of its own body as a distinct entity—around the third month of its life. The sense of separateness, of an individuality that differentiates the infant from others, also starts manifesting around this time. Contact with the mother, and also with other human beings, helps this development. This sense of separateness is the foundation on which the other aspect of the self-image, the 'me-self'—defined by the child's physical, psychological, and social characteristics—is built. We have all noticed young children talking about themselves in the third person. By noticing that its own actions cause objects and people to react in predictable ways, infants and young children start seeing themselves as separate individuals with particular names. The process of formation of the self-image is aided by parents, friends, teachers, and society. Unfortunately, we are often not aware of our self-image, which is not a congenital given but an acquired trait—the result of interaction between genetically determined personality characteristics and the environment. Our individuality not only gives us a distinct identity, it is also essential for protecting this identity. But this individuality is at the root of much of our interpersonal problems too, for the development of this sense of separateness from the world is concomitant with the formation of the desires that control and enslave us.

Our individuality is closely related to our ego, the sense of our own value and importance. By reducing the influence of the ego on our behaviour, we can even alter the nature of our desires. Sri

Ramakrishna describes this process as transforming the ego from an unripe to a ripe one—from *kacha ami* to *paka ami*. This transformation of the ego is the first step in attenuating our sense of separateness from others and in preventing clashes of egos.

At this stage, a legitimate question may arise: Is it possible not to have an individuality? How are we to function in the world if we do not have an individuality? It is difficult for us even to conceive the idea that we can exist without a sense of separateness. We believe that we exist because we are distinct from others and from the world. We feel that if we were to lose this sense of individuality we would be no more, we would be extinguished. This common feeling persists as long as we do not come across persons who are able to demonstrate through their lives that the ego and its sense of individuality can be positively transformed.

The Permanent Solution

The *Isha Upanishad* tells us:

*Yastu sarvāṇi bhūtānyātmanyevānupaśyati;
Sarvabhūteṣu cātmanāṁ tato na vijugupsate.*

He who sees all beings in the Self itself, and the Self in all beings, feels no hatred by virtue of that (realization).

In this state, there is no rigid individuality, no sense of separateness. Individuals who remained in such a state are known to have shown great compassion and established loving relationships with others. They lived like masters, not like slaves of desires and distorted emotions. When this state is achieved, strictly speaking, there are no more relationships. There is only 'one', and that 'one' includes me and all others. It seems a utopian ideal, but mystics and prophets have demonstrated through their lives that it is much more than an abstract ideal—it is a living truth. Their example could guide us in fostering loving relationships.

Swami Vivekananda, for example, had arguments with his brother disciples on many occasions, at times he was very strict with some of them; yet nobody faulted him, for everyone was aware of his

Almost all men in the world have usurped the throne where God should sit. On that throne where God should be, a most worthless slave has been given place. This is the ego. When you know this, then drive out the ego. When you do this and become the slave or servant of God instead, you will realize your eternal nature.

—Swami Ramakrishnananda

empathy. His harsh words were harmless because they emanated from the substratum of the unity of all human beings. The relationship he had with his brother disciples was never altered, even in the face of temporary clashes. Sri Ramakrishna also scolded his disciples, sometimes reprimanded them with sternness. But their sweet relationship remained intact; rather, such corrective action only reinforced their relationship. The disciples subliminally imbued the compassion and love underlying the reprimand.

Compare their situation with the heated arguments and verbal fights we see around us. We are quick to sense the hatred and jealousy encapsulated in other people's words. We are equally quick to react verbally to these signals. The result is strained relationship. The essential difference between the two ways of establishing relationships lies in the self-image. Our distorted self-image forces us to create an equally distorted image of others. But when Sri Ramakrishna or Swami Vivekananda interacted with people, they were aware of the divine nature of all human beings. How could they hurt the divinity inherent in them? They did not see the human beings as only human, but as divinities garbed in physical bodies. Swami Vivekananda says, 'The only God to worship is the human soul in the human body', and 'We are the servants of that God who by the ignorant is called MAN'. He had this to say about those who vilified him: 'I have been slandered by priests and laymen alike. But what of it? Bless them all! They are my very Self, and have they not helped me by acting as a spring-board from which my energy could take higher and higher flights?'

Therefore, when we stop perceiving ourselves as

mortal physical humans and start seeing ourselves as the children of immortal Bliss, our relationship with others is spontaneously divinized. Our ordinary human nature is burnt and is replaced by an abiding sense of divinity. The subconscious, which is the storehouse of our desires and foibles, is transformed. There is no more relationship at a human level as such, since there is no 'other' to be related with—a Self-realized person is one with the whole humanity.

The task then is not to search for piecemeal solutions, not to do a patch-up work, not to look for 'corrections', but to transform ourselves completely. Corrective or partial solutions may help us occasionally, they may have a temporary utility, but to see them as the final solution is a mistake. Sceptics may wonder that all this is too far-fetched, impractical, or even a figment of our imagination. But who can deny the transient nature of relationships built on the ever-slippery sands of the ego? Human desires are infinite and they are bound to cause upheavals in our relationships. Only by replacing our distorted limited self-image with a divine one can we provide a healthier and more stable base for our relationships.

Achieving this goal appears to be a colossal task; the ideal is seemingly unattainable. But an attempt at it is worth the effort. Even a little effort will show us that our daily relationships start improving as our self-image starts getting transformed. We may have to resort to stern measures occasionally, but we shall soon discover that once our egos have been softened our relationships do not get permanently damaged. We may get into arguments, but that will not wreck our friendships. By constant introspection on our thoughts and motives with reference to the examples of such lives as Swami Vivekananda's or Sri Ramakrishna's, we become more aware of our situation. By meditating on our divine nature we gradually bring about a transformation within ourselves. Maintaining relationships based on our puny egos with its desires no longer remains an issue. We transcend the concept of relationship itself. We go beyond human relationship.



Religion, Atheism, and Evolution of Thought

Mehul Desai

IN this age of intense innovation, irrational exuberance, and increasing disparity, there is a growing dialogue, debate, and discontent over religion. Fundamentalism is on the rise the world over, provoking greater scrutiny of the role of religion both in public policy and personal beliefs, especially amongst the scientifically and rationally inclined. *The God Delusion*, a best-seller by the celebrated scholar Richard Dawkins, prompted me to examine more closely the concept of God, within and without the context of religion.

In his book 'Dawkins contends that a supernatural creator almost certainly does not exist and that belief in a personal god qualifies as a delusion'. He also argues that atheists can be 'happy, balanced, moral, and intellectually fulfilled'.

I must admit I am not a scholar of religion. The following thoughts are not definitive, but are offered tentatively to initiate dialogue with those who are genuine aspirants to inner evolution. I have attempted to structure my thoughts around three central themes, namely organized religion versus religion per se, atheism versus dualism and monism, and the concept of God versus evolution of thought.

Organized Religion v. 'Religion'

Often enough I find religion being confused with organized religion. I personally feel these are two very different entities. Religion, for me, is a very personal belief system built over time and based upon internal as well as external stimuli. Organized religion has to do with the gathering of people sharing common beliefs around an organization or institution, and hence is largely impersonal. The former may be influenced by very different factors, ranging from the music one listens to, or the

preacher's rant at the pulpit, or a book on theology that one happens to browse through; the latter has a more rigid framework of dogma and cult aimed at shaping the thought and behaviour of its followers. Organized religion is just like any other organization which takes birth, thrives for a period of time, and eventually dies, literally or metaphorically—though one may argue that the major religions of today have a fairly long history and are far from dead. Religion in contrast is meant to serve an evolutionary purpose, and therefore is possibly coeval with human existence.

Most attacks and ridicule accorded to religion, if examined from the above perspective, will actually be found to be directed towards organized religion. For us, as individuals, believing that the difference between the two is merely a matter of semantics will adversely affect our own evolution, for organized religion will follow its own course, whereas religion—which needs to be accepted, internalized, and lived—will most definitely enable us to evolve. In fact, acceptance and internalization of religion has always been the core belief of every organized religion at the outset. This function gradually became circumscribed when 'religion' was interpreted to mean specific rituals and dogmas.

Atheism v. Dualism and Monism

I personally find self-declared atheists to be largely falling into one of the following categories: One, they are actually seeking religion, but are frustrated by the scenario presented through organized religion. They fail to challenge themselves on thoughts related to God and are taking a somewhat easy way out by quickly declaring the non-existence of God. Two, they think it fashionable to be atheists and

The Great Crossing

The Buddha said: A man beginning a long journey sees ahead a vast body of water. There is neither boat nor bridge. To escape the dangers of his present location, he constructs a raft of grass and branches. When he reaches the other side he realizes how useful the raft was and wonders if he should hoist it on his back and carry it with him forever. Now if he did this, would he be wise? Or, having crossed to safety, should he place the raft in a high dry location for someone else to use? This is the way I have taught the dharma, the doctrine—for crossing, not for keeping. Cast aside every proper state of mind, O monks—much less wrong ones—and remember well to leave the raft behind!

feel that by declaring themselves so they increase their intellectual stature, or conversely have been labelled as intellectuals and hence feel that their new-found status requires them to replace the concept of God with their own belief systems revolving around the non-existence of God.

I have yet to find an atheist who logically has been able to explain what he or she means by ‘non-existence of God’, because that would involve denying existence as an attribute of God. This is analogous to saying one knows what hot is but not cold. When pressed with this line of argument, most atheists quickly fall back on the plea of being indifferent to the concept of God, and by doing so seek refuge in one of the above categories.

Categorizations aside, atheism as traditionally defined evolves mainly from an egoistic outlook as opposed to a humble one, resulting in the shifting of an aspirant for inner evolution from a position of relative strength to one of weakness. In contrast, religion—not necessarily organized religion—has always helped an aspirant evolve from a state of weakness to one of strength.

I have nothing against atheism. My personal belief system or religion is based on the Upanishads, and this leads me to the firm conviction that it is important for me to always maintain an attitude of

complete humility towards the ultimate goal—the total destruction of the personal ego.

I have consistently found that, at their core, every organized religion preaches a gradual evolution in which an aspirant first moves from a relatively inferior state of consciousness to a superior one that involves a relationship with a higher Entity—dualism; next, this relationship progresses to a state where both the aspirant and the superior Entity are part of one ‘ecosystem’—qualified non-dualism; and finally unfolds in the aspirant the understanding or realization that aspirant, superior Entity, and ‘ecosystem’ are truly one and the same—non-dualism or monism. This evolution demands humility in order to achieve the total destruction of the personal ego; otherwise, if the starting point stems from a self-centred attitude that shifts towards just a higher ego-centred position, it becomes infinitely more difficult to achieve the evolutionary goal.

I would like to believe that there is a state akin to real or absolute atheism, which is beyond a state related, in one way or other, to God; and if I am to reach this state of absolute atheism I must first pass through a state related to God, which can only be achieved through complete humility as opposed to the egoistic position taken by self-declared atheists. I would also like to believe that this world would be a better place if everyone strove to become an absolute atheist, using one’s own belief in God as a starting point of humility and effective strength, instead of destroying one’s personal belief in God, which inherently degrades to an egoistic outlook and weakness of character.

Concept of God v. Evolution of Thought

At this stage it would be natural to ask: What is ‘God’? Is it a supernatural being, a certification agency for righteousness, or a state of mind? I do not profess in any way to have the answer, but I definitely find many of the attempts at defining God to be bordering on the ridiculous. I may believe that God is a human with a monkey-head, possibly because I like monkeys or because I like the notion of a personal God who wants to suppress

his—and others’—vanity by having the head of a monkey to symbolize humility, as a pre-requisite to the destruction of the personal ego. Incidentally, using the same logic, monkeys could very well have a God with a human-head.

At the onset of my religious journey I may well have started out by worshipping the Hindu god Hanuman as I found his image appealing, but if I continue to worship the symbol without evolving the thought related to the character of the symbol, intellectually I would be on a par with those that claim the non-existence of God because in their opinion the existence of God requires them to believe in a God with a monkey-head.

The point is that all symbols and deities, from the beginning of time—whether they were elements of nature, or mythological gods, or the Buddha state of mind, or a variable in an equation that explains the cosmos—have always been the means to an end; and our confusing the means for the end can only thwart our own inner evolution.

Effectively, religion is a personal journey influenced by the internal and external environment, and like any other journey has its ups and downs. If the goal is to evolve, it is imperative that we accept our current situation, which requires a state of humility for the continuous evolution of thought, or approach to God, as the faithful would rather call it.

There is no doubt that we continue to witness tremendous turmoil and loss of life under the banners of organized religion. However, on closer examination it is clear that the drivers for this chaos are, in their fundamental nature, more socio-economic than religious. Hence, I feel that an even bigger burden sits on the shoulders of scientifically and rationally inclined people, who need to dissociate religion from organized religion and promote the evolution of thought that may also be based on a personal belief in God. It is this evolution of thought that runs as a common thread through the different schools of theology, organized religions, and atheism.

I would like to end by quoting a hymn describing the state of nirvana, composed in the eighth century CE by Sri Shankaracharya, one of the key

proponents of the Advaita or non-dualistic school of thought in Hinduism:

Om. I am neither mind, intelligence, ego,
nor chitta,
Neither ears nor tongue nor the senses
of smell and sight;
Nor am I ether, earth, fire, water, or air:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss:
I am Shiva! I am Shiva!

I am neither the Prana nor the five vital breaths,
Neither the seven elements of the body
nor its five sheaths,
Nor hands nor feet nor tongue, nor the organs
of sex and voiding:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss:
I am Shiva! I am Shiva!

Neither loathing nor liking have I, neither greed
nor delusion;
No sense have I of ego or pride, neither dharma
nor moksha;
Neither desire of the mind
nor object for its desiring:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss:
I am Shiva! I am Shiva!

Neither right nor wrongdoing am I,
neither pleasure nor pain,
Nor the mantra, the sacred place, the Vedas,
the sacrifice;
Neither the act of eating, the eater, nor the food:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss:
I am Shiva! I am Shiva!

Death or fear I have none, nor any distinction
of caste;
Neither father nor mother nor even a birth
have I;
Neither friend nor comrade, neither disciple
nor guru:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss:
I am Shiva! I am Shiva!

I have no form or fancy; the All-pervading am I;
Everywhere I exist, yet I am beyond the senses;
Neither salvation am I, nor anything
that may be known:
I am Pure Knowledge and Bliss:
I am Shiva! I am Shiva!



Narada Bhakti Sutra

Swami Bhaskareswarananda

(Continued from the September issue)

9. Tasminnananyatā

tad-virodhi ūdāsīnatā ca.

In such [renunciation] there is complete unification, and indifference to everything opposite [to bhakti].

NARADA says there must be *ananyatā* with Bhagavan—absolute identity with the absolute Reality, in which there is no separate existence of any object or the individual. It is like the salt doll melting in the sea, because the nature of both is the same. Its natural result is transcendental *ūdāsīnatā*, total indifference towards shadows. In the never-changing knowledge of the bhakta, Bhagavan alone is real. Nothing else is real. Hence there is transcendental indifference towards everything belonging to the subject-object realm. This is not a deliberate indifference, but is born naturally of knowledge and consciousness of the absolute Reality.

10. Anyāśrayā ā tyāgo'nanyatā.

Unification is the giving up of all other support.

Ananyatā means identity, the presence of 'no other'. It is real identity with the absolute Reality, the reality of all. Since there is 'no other', opposite vibrations cannot arise.

Narada gives the way to the ideal too.

11. Loka-vede u tad-anukūlācara a tad-virodhi ūdāsīnatā.

'Indifference to everything opposite' means per-

formance of such secular and sacred activities that are conducive to devotion.

Udāsīnatā or indifference is not callousness. One might be fascinated by something and might become indifferent to other objects. Absent-mindedness or planned *ūdāsīnatā* is not an expression of detachment.

The bhakta is not inactive. In Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda we see total *ūdāsīnatā* towards the world, yet how active they were for the sake of the world! For Sri Ramakrishna, the absolute Reality was expressed in various forms. He said to Swami Vivekananda that the very Reality which he experienced in transcendental samadhi is the reality immanent in the whole world. This is the consciousness of the bhakta and the basis of his *ūdāsīnatā*. All his activities are an expression of this consciousness, *tadanukūla ācaraṇa*; and *tad-virodhiṣu ūdāsīnatā* implies indifference towards the subject-object realm.

12. Bhavatu niścaya-dār hyādūrdhva

śāstra-rak a am.

Let the scriptures be followed till a firm conviction is obtained.

After describing the absolute nature of *parā bhakti*, Narada now comes to the relative plane. You must remember that your life is not perfect; you are not established in *parā bhakti*. A sadhaka may confuse *siddhi*, realization, with *sādhana*, the means to realization. The *siddha*, realized soul, experiences God in all forms. But the sadhaka's actual consciousness is not such, though he may have the intellectual conviction or the emotional idea that Bhagavan is everywhere. If with this imperfection he behaves like a *siddha*, he will have a fall. So Narada comes

The text comprises the edited notes of Swami Bhaskareswarananda's classes on the *Narada Bhakti Sutra*, taken down by some residents of the Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur. The classes were conducted between 17 December 1965 and 24 January 1966.

forward and shows the way.

As has been said, the sadhaka must draw inspiration from the knowledge of the ideal. But this should not be a mere emotional experience, as that might lead to ruin. Therefore, Narada says that inspiration must follow the spirit of the scriptures. Scriptures are spiritual truths provided by the seers of Reality. Sri Ramakrishna always referred to the scriptures.

You may have inspiration, but it does not last long. Narada says that you must also have conviction about the nature of Truth—the nature of your ideal. It must be adamant, a *drydha-niścaya*. Then your inspiration will be permanent. Base everything on the spirit of the scriptures. Conviction becomes established through both understanding and feeling; and both of these must be based on the spirit of the scriptures. From this will come real, permanent inspiration. Base all your convictions on the scriptures, not on your whimsical emotions, nor on your ego, thinking, ‘I know and understand everything.’ Emotion is always deceptive. Thieves come in the guise of sadhus. Lust will come to you as love, and it is said, ‘Love is God’, and this will lead you to the dogs. Evil emotion can be detected only with the help of the Shastras. For this reason Narada advises *śāstra-rakṣaṇa*, honouring the Shastras.

13. *Anyathā pātityāśankayā.*

Otherwise, there is danger of fall.

Narada is stressing the nature of the means to *parā bhakti* through *anvaya-vyatireka-nyāya*, the method of agreement and contrariety. If you follow the Shastras, you will reach the ideal through gradual evolution. If you do not, then you will not remain as you are, you will have a fall.

A fall never takes place all of a sudden; it is preceded by psychological changes in one’s attitude and approach to the ideal. Hence Narada does not say *patana*, fall, but *pātitya*, state of fall. First, the power of discrimination, *viveka-buddhi*, gets muddled, and then one starts falling.

14. *Loko’pi tāvadeva; bhojanādi-vyāpārastvāśarīra-dhāra āvadhi.*

Social customs may also be followed to the same extent; activities like taking food may be continued till the body lasts.

When and for how long should one follow the scriptures? Some observe the injunctions of the Shastras only during puja or worship. Others observe them while living in a monastery and forget them when they move in society. Naturally, there is danger of a fall in such cases. That is why Narada advises that the spirit of the Shastras must be honoured within the walls of the monastery as well as outside. How long? Until you realize God, *tāvadeva*. As long as you do not realize the ideal, do not trust your mind, but follow the spirit of the scriptures in all circumstances. Not social customs, but it is the spirit of the Shastras and the principles of spiritual life that must be followed, always and in all circumstances, till *brahma-jñāna*.

After realization, your life will be completely transformed. *Brahma-jñāna* will totally spiritualize your personality. There will not be any subject-object dichotomy or I-consciousness. Till you attain that, follow the scriptures.

The question arises: We see such *siddhas* eating, walking, and talking. How does one explain that? Narada says that such persons perform all these activities without dualistic consciousness. Within them there is nothing but God-consciousness. All their apparently human activities are *lila*, expressions of the consciousness of Brahman everywhere, *sarvaṁ khalvidam brahma*. God’s *lila* goes on in such persons’ lives. To the ignorant, the *siddha*’s life appears to be similar to ours. Consequently they are not able to understand such persons.

15. *Tallak a ānivācyante nānā-mata-bhedāt.*

The characteristics of bhakti are described according to different viewpoints.

Narada, the practical bhakta, states that temperaments vary from person to person. He says that the goal can be reached by following different ways, according to one’s temperament. Do not imitate

others but follow the path suited to your temperament properly, holding on to your principles.

16. Pūjādi vanurāga iti pārāśarya .

Vyasa, the son of Parashara, is of the opinion that bhakti is devotion to acts of worship and the like.

‘Love of worship’, in reality, refers to the love for the object of worship, that is, God. This *anurāga* or love is the basis of the *anurāga* for puja. A lover of God goes to the rose garden not with the primary aim of plucking flowers but out of love for God. The communion with God, which is already taking place within, makes the devotee pluck flowers and string them into garlands. It is not an ordinary person but Parasharya—that is, Vyasa—who says that love for worship will ultimately lead you to your goal through greater and greater communion with the Beloved.

This has been amply demonstrated by Sri Ramakrishna in his life as pujari of the Divine Mother. He is a remarkable example of *pūjādiṣu anurāgaḥ*, devotion to acts of worship and the like. His matchless love for worship resulted in samadhi, absolute loss of individuality in the Divine Mother. So, puja will lead you to the goal if it is done with real *anurāga*, and with the knowledge of the nature of the object of worship and your relationship with it.

17. Kathādi viti garga .

According to Garga, it is devotion to sacred talks and chants.

Puja may not be suitable for all. So, *kathādiṣu anurāgaḥ*, love of *nāma-guṇa-kīrtana*, singing the names and glories of God is another way. Not mere conversation, nor the performances of the so-called *kīrtanakāras*, professional singers, who try to make people laugh with nonsensical talks, but kirtana done with *anurāga* will give you very close communion with the Beloved. Mahapurush Swami Shivananda once emphatically said that he had himself experienced that the whole garden complex of Dakshineswar reverberated and throbbed, as it were, with *caitanya*, divine Consciousness, when Sri Ramakrishna danced singing the glories of God and repeatedly merged into samadhi. So Garga says

that *kathādiṣu anurāgaḥ* leads to increasing absorption, and ultimately to absolute identity with God in samadhi, as seen in Sri Ramakrishna.

18. Ātmaratyavirodheneti śā dilya .

Sage Shandilya holds that it [bhakti] must not be contradictory to delight in the Atman.

This is for those with a predominance of knowledge in their temperament. Anything you do without the awareness of Reality, your Atman, is not bhakti. Puja will be real puja, kirtana will be real kirtana only if there is awareness of the Atman. We see this again in Sri Ramakrishna.

19. Nāradastu tadarpitākhilācāratā tad-vismara e parama-vyakulateti (ca).

But, according to Narada, the essential characteristics of bhakti are the consecration of all activities by complete surrender to Him and extreme anguish on failing to remember Him.

The expressions of bhakti may be many, and you may follow any one of the many pathways of bhakti, but, *tu*, there should be no limitation of consciousness. Hence Narada speaks of *tadarpita akhilācāratā*, surrendering all actions to *Tat*, the absolute Reality. There should be a feeling of complete surrender to Him in your thinking, feeling, and willing. He is the thinker within your thinking and in the thinking of the whole world. He is expressed in thought as well as in objects of thought. So also in feeling and willing. Therefore, every aspect of your life and all aspects of your personality should be offered to *Tat*, the absolute Reality. This means that one’s consciousness must be grounded in the absolute Reality. All thought and action—even ordinary activity—is due to Him. This consciousness will spiritualize your total life and personality. This is *arpaṇa*, offering, which is bhakti without limitation.

What is the nature of such an attunement with the Beloved? Narada says: Forgetfulness, even for a second, will cause terrible anguish. As a matter of fact, there cannot be any question of forgetfulness, because the devotee has become identified with Him; only this has been expressed in the language

of love. Even if one conceives of separation for a moment, one feels terrible anguish, which is only a manifestation of complete union.

Those gopis who could not go to Sri Krishna fell unconscious due to the anguish of separation. And Shukadeva says that within this anguish of apparent separation there is absolute union with Sri Krishna in their being and consciousness. Thus this anguish is only the negative expression of absolute surrender.

20. Astyevamevam.

Examples of such perfection do exist.

After describing the nature of the goal—devotion and God-realization—Narada now gives examples which can inspire the sadhaka to feel devotion for God. Bhaktas may feel that the ideal is too high and impossible to achieve. Hence Narada says that there are such examples, *evam evam*.

21. Yathā vraja-gopikānām.

Such was the bhakti of the gopis of Vraja.

It is difficult to fully appreciate the examples. We must go deep into the spirit of the examples to ascertain the truth. The pictures of such examples are generally misunderstood and you may be misled. Narada sees this natural psychological pitfall and helps the sadhaka to penetrate through the example in the next sutra.

22. Tatrāpi na mātmya-jñāna-vism tyapavāda .

Even there the blame that they forgot the glory of the Lord is not valid.

The gopis are considered the greatest lovers of Sri Krishna. A thought arises in the mind: They are loving a person who is not their husband; theirs is the love of a paramour. If this be the ideal of bhakti, what should we do? Due to such doubts, the bhaktas are unable to put their whole soul in sadhana. But Narada shows the special significance of the example which will remove your doubt and guide you along the spiritual path. If without understanding the consciousness of the gopis, the bhaktas accept

them as their ideal, they will be lead astray. Men may fall in love with women for practising such love. But Narada says: *Tatrāpi*, even in this case, do not merely look at the externals. Look at the consciousness of the gopis. The gopis did not consider Sri Krishna a human being. They had only the consciousness of Bhagavan—the absolute Reality, the reality of all—with regard to him.

23. Tad-vihīna jārā ām-iva.

Without it [the consciousness of the glory of Bhagavan], their love would have been similar to that of a mistress for her paramour.

24. Nāstyeva tasmin tat-sukha-sukhitvam.

In that love, one's happiness does not consist in happiness of the other.

How are we to know that their love was not like those of adulterers? There is a difference. In the love of the adulterer there is always selfishness, desire for money and physical enjoyment. Such love is bound to change. In contrast, look at the transcendental love of the gopis. You need not take the gopis as personal exemplars; but accept the sublime value of their example—their self-effacement and unselfish love, *mātmya-jñāna* and *tat-sukha-sukhitvam*.

When in the *rāsa-līlā*—his sport with the gopis—Sri Krishna disappears, the gopis feel extreme anguish. Their terrible anguish is an expression of their absolute communion with him. They are conscious of Sri Krishna's transcendent nature: 'Na khalu gopikā-nandano bhavān, you are not merely the son of a gopi'; you are Bhagavan who has appeared on earth in response to Brahma's prayer.

The gopis appealed to Sri Krishna to reappear before them. They felt that his 'lotus feet' would get hurt in the forest, and this they could not bear to think of. This is *tat-sukha-sukhitvam*. This is the essence of the love of the gopis, and in their consciousness Sri Krishna was 'akhila-dehinām-antarātma-dyṅk; the indweller and witness of all embodied beings'. Thus their love is neither personalized nor mere emotionalism.

When the gopis were feeling great distress due to Sri Krishna's going away to Mathura, Uddhava came

and asked them to meditate on Sri Krishna, the all pervading Reality. The gopis replied, 'We don't have another mind to meditate with.' It shows total identity with their beloved and absolute I-lessness. He is the meditator, the meditation, and the object of meditation. Hence Uddhava says, 'May I be born as a creeper in Vrindaban so as to be blessed by the dust of the feet of the gopis.' Such is the transcendental beauty of the egoless consciousness of the gopis.

Such absorption leads to illumination through transcendence of 'I' and 'mine'. There is total absence of lust and no trace of ordinary human consciousness in this absorption. We must not judge an illustration according to our limited understanding, but must penetrate deep to know the truth behind it.

25. *Sā tu karma-jñāna-yogebhyo'py-adhikatarā.*

But Bhakti is superior to karma, jnana, and yoga.

Narada again stresses the fundamental nature of bhakti—absolute absence of subject-object consciousness and total effacement of ego-consciousness—by the comparative '*adhikatarā*, superior to'. Here 'karma' implies subject-object consciousness. However great karma might be, it stands nowhere in comparison with *parā bhakti*, where there is absolute self-effacement and merger of the sadhaka in Bhagavan. Here the point of emphasis is not *adhikatarā*, but the implicit glory of I-lessness.

Jnana, as it is generally practised, also involves subject-object dualism. The assertion 'I am one with Brahman' contains 'I' and 'Brahman', and therefore a duality. Vishishtadvaita also involves dualism. This dualistic knowledge has been taken up by Narada. Yoga says, 'Suppress the *citta-vṛttis*, mental modifications, to have a glimpse of the Atman.' Here there is the dualism of Purusha and Prakriti. Thus *parā bhakti* is superior to it.

Through this process of glorification Narada reinforces the sadhaka's objectless consciousness. Here Narada is not comparing the various disciplines. Selfless karma also leads to transcendental knowledge; so does jnana. Real yoga too, as pointed out in the Gita, and by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Viveka-

nanda, leads to transcendental identity, in which Patanjali's system of yoga is a help. Then, *parā bhakti* is superior to karma, jnana, and yoga because in it there is the consciousness of complete surrender—a consciousness devoid of subject-object duality.

26. *Phala-rūpatvāt.*

Because it is of the nature of the result [of all the three means mentioned above].

Parā bhakti is the *ānanda* or bliss aspect of *sat-cit-ānanda* Brahman. This is the goal of jnana, karma, and yoga too. If you practise karma in the spirit of karma yoga, you will get this transcendental *ānanda*.

'The individual soul is none other than the supreme Soul, *jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ*'—this is true knowledge or jnana. On gaining this transcendental experience, a transcendental bliss flashes forth; this is *parā bhakti*. You will experience transcendental bliss, which is an aspect of Brahman, according to the degree of self-effacement and identity with Brahman you have achieved.

Today you are identified with the objects of enjoyment. By yoga you will separate your personality from the vibrations of enjoyment associated with these objects. Then you will get the glimpse of the Atman; and this will give you transcendental bliss. Thus *parā bhakti* is *adhikatarā* because it is the fruit of true spiritual endeavour. Absolute realization is the same; you may get it through any path.

It is not *phala* or result in the sense of an objective achievement. Narada says '*phala-rūpatvāt*, (it) being of the nature of a result' and not '*phalatvāt*, (it) being a result'. This transcendental *ānanda* of the nature of Brahman is not produced by your karma, jnana, or yoga; it is already there in you. It merely manifests itself when you become pure through the sadhana of karma, jnana, or yoga. When, through sadhana, you will comprehend that you are nought, then the *pūrṇa* or 'whole' will manifest itself in you. It only appears to have come through sadhana, but in reality it manifests itself wherever there is transcendental intuition. This is the meaning and spirit of '*phala-rūpatvāt*'. (To be continued)

Light on Patanjali – IV

Swami Sarvagatananda

Sincerity

MANY times you read things out of curiosity, as a novel, for fun—oh, this is good, that is good; you go on moving from book to book, from theme to theme, from idea to idea, from ideal to ideal, you appreciate it. What is needed is conviction, not appreciation; if you are convinced, follow it, dive deep into it, test it in your life. Do not move superficially, it does not help.

Spiritual life is not for superficially minded people. Whatever you think, think seriously about it; no pretensions, no hypocrisy, be honest with yourself. If you believe in something, then follow it, you cannot reject it. You need not please anybody in the world; you have to satisfy your own inner being. That is why in spiritual life first come conviction, honesty, and steadfastness—all these things are necessary. Otherwise, you take it very lightly, because the conviction is not there. To gain conviction you have to search for proofs, ‘Why should I believe in this, why should I take this for granted?’ Question yourself; it is not about what others believe in but what you believe in.

A strong conviction is necessary; then you dive deep. Otherwise what happens? Today you accept one thing, tomorrow you read another book; another friend says something different, and you stop one religious practice and start something else. This is what generally happens in our modern society, because there is so much knowledge, so much is thrown at us, so many books, so many cults, so

naturally we are often baffled, confused. That is why the knowledge explosion is not always good, it causes indigestion also. You cannot digest all those things unless you are sure of what you are aiming at, where you can find the things to follow. All disciplines are good, mind that. No discipline is bad, provided you follow it. But to simply move about on the surface does not help.

In the spiritual life, as Sri Ramakrishna plainly pointed out, be sincere, be earnest, be serious, be steadfast; then alone will you get something. That is, you have to dive deep into yourself.

Thoughts and the Mind

You cannot remove any thought. Suppose you don’t want anything in your room. You can clean out the whole room, throw everything out. But you cannot do that with thoughts; once they come to you they are your property, whether you like it or not. Good, bad, or indifferent, all thoughts are there with you. How they are handled is up to you.

Purifying the mind means making [instinctual] thoughts ineffective. How? By detachment, that is all. Don’t pay attention to the thoughts, don’t be interested in them; they will all lie down, sleep. If you pay attention, if you are interested, they will come up. That is why often in your idle time, leisure time, you enjoy or are miserable—because you dig up thoughts from the past, even though you know that you are wasting your time.

Raja yoga gives you the art of controlling thoughts, making them ineffective. Patanjali speaks of constant practice and dispassion. What is constant practice? Constant awareness of the pure Being, the Purusha. Put the mind on the pure Being, don’t be interested in any other thought. Thoughts do come, but don’t

The text is a compilation of minimally edited extracts from the author’s book *Meditation as Spiritual Culmination: Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* (Boston: Vedanta Society of Massachusetts, 2005). The book is a transcript of the author’s lectures on raja yoga, delivered between September 1977 and June 1981, at Boston.

pay attention to them. Thoughts arise because of some suggestion outside. They don't come without a suggestion. There are millions of thoughts in your mind now; why don't all of them come up? They arise according to the external suggestion. Something is seen outside—outside of the mind—from inside a thought arises, and you are a victim. From the external suggestion, internal urges come up; they play games, and you are in between, a victim.

Patanjali tells you: 'Control them, control them, control them.' When you control them, a time comes when all of them are rendered ineffective, almost dead; [or remain] in their unmanifested condition. They are almost dead, they do not manifest. The unmanifested condition is called the second stage of samadhi—the thoughts are there but they do not disturb you. This stage is called the state of no-mind. In this mind there is no pulsation, no impression, no thought, no urge, no modification.

Two Types of Samadhi

In his *Yoga Sutra*, Patanjali explains the two distinctive aspects of samadhi: *samprajnata*, where you question, discriminate, and have feelings of amazement; and *asamprajnata*, where there is no pulsation of thought, no awareness.

In the first stage of samadhi, when the mind gains one-pointedness it gets an experience of sudden questioning: 'What is this?' Up until now the mind was cognizing many things, multiple perceptions, ideas, images—the mind was dwelling on them. When you silence and resolve them, you experience a kind of amazement, a kind of wonderment—'What is this?' When a man who had never seen an ocean saw it for the first time, he opened his mouth and said: 'What is this?' It happens just like this. There you ask yourself: 'What happened to all those things which I had been seeing until now?' The memory is there, the questioning, the discrimination, these things shine before the mental horizon.

The second stage of samadhi comes due to purification, with more concentration, more steadiness: 'By the constant practice of cessation of all mental

activity, in which the mind-stuff retains only the unmanifested impressions.' Then the questioning, the discrimination stops, everything is silenced. That experience, as described earlier, is as when you go to the top of a mountain, lie flat on your back, look at the sky when there are no clouds, no birds flying, when you see nothing, only expanse, or space, pure and simple, blank, the mind takes that form for the time being—there is nothing visible except space; all are silenced; no thoughts, no images, no clouds, no birds, no moon, no sun, only the vast sky.

The mind takes that form in the second stage of samadhi. When this comes, what actually happens? All mental impressions are silenced, because of purity of mind obtained through constant detachment from all other thoughts, all other impressions. What are the thoughts and impressions that have been gathered by you from childhood up until now? They are not you, they are not part of your being; they have come from outside, are due to knowledge and experience combined. All the thoughts and ideas and impressions are there, they are silenced now. You don't remove them, you become detached, you become unconcerned, unrelated, they do not drag you, you become strong; due to will power you control your mind completely, you say: 'Nothing doing.' In that stage everything is submerged, the thoughts and impressions go down.

Meditation

Only those who are just like Buddha can keep the mind alert and awake, and wipe off everything that comes in. Therefore, it is specifically mentioned: When persons without training and preparation try to make their minds vacant, they are likely to succeed only in covering themselves in *tamas*. Now, this is another thing: When people, without any aid, wanting to clear off everything, sit quietly—do you know what happens? They slowly go to sleep. That is why in the meditation class you get good sleep. Many people will say: 'I have had a good meditation, I have slept well.' Do you know why? The preparation for meditation and sleep is the same up to a particular point.

You say: 'Let us relax our body and mind, getting rid of all alien and unbecoming thoughts and feelings, and let us enter into our inner sanctuary.' Then comes: 'Let us meditate.' And you become awake and conscious, or get sleepy—in sleep, you go down. That is the point where, if you become awake, conscious, you are all right; but if you are not careful, slowly, unconsciously you go to sleep. That is why you should never bend your spine when you sit for class—a little bending of the spine and slowly you relax. If you keep the spine straight, you are alert, and you overcome sleep. In meditation, keep the spine straight. If it is a little crooked, meditation is finished. That is the experience. Keep the mind alert. It is very difficult but not impossible.

'The success of yogis differs according to the means they adopt are mild, medium, or intense.' That is why in yoga it is said that you have to meditate daily once, twice, thrice, many times. What is the purpose? The idea is that when you keep the mind calm and quiet through meditation, it stays that way even when you throw this mind into society.

You are influenced by so many thoughts, so many ideas, so many personal equations, that you have to come back to meditation to resolve them, and again you go back to society. Going back and forth, sooner or later, you will dive deep into yourself. The more time you give for meditation, the better it is.

Do it continuously, then alone this mind can be controlled. Otherwise, it is a little meditation and then going back to society; continually doing this does not help. The more time we give for meditation the better it is. Meditation does not mean that you have to go to your room and sit there—this is another wrong conception of meditation. Meditation is not the place where you sit, it is a state of mind. In the beginning you need the right kind of discipline, you have to set the atmosphere so that the mind can get into the correct mood.

But as you develop meditation, as you progress in mental evolution, you discover that you can meditate in any place, sitting anywhere, without

Sadhana · This tremendous determination to struggle, a hundredfold more determination than that which you put forth to gain anything which belongs to this life, is the first great preparation.

And then along with it, there must be meditation. Meditation is the one thing. Meditate! The greatest thing is meditation. It is the nearest approach to spiritual life—the mind meditating. It is the one moment in our daily life that we are not at all material—the Soul thinking of Itself, free from all matter—this marvellous touch of the Soul!
—Swami Vivekananda

needing even to sit straight or burn incense. You can sit anywhere, but go carefully through the preparatory meditation; by understanding every word prepare your mind: 'Let us meditate on the abiding presence of the all-loving being seated on the throne of our heart, radiating joy, light, and peace.'

Wherever you are, wherever you sit, you can create the right atmosphere, you can dive deep into yourself, you do not need a particular place. These are false notions: 'Oh, I must go back to that particular place, and I must sit on a particular seat. Certain people must not be there; I must sit at that place alone, then I will get meditation, otherwise not.' If I am disturbed when a particular person sits in front of me, then where am I? That is an impossible situation. Meditation is not a thing to be done in a chapel or in a shrine, at a particular time or place; meditation is a mood of the mind.

You can enter into this mood of meditation anywhere, sitting quietly; in a big crowd you can be alone, you can meditate in a busy place if you know the art. You have to create the right kind of atmosphere, within yourself, not externally. You don't always get the external situation as you want it. That is why Jesus said: 'Enter into thy closet, shut the door.' Closet means not a place, but in your own mind. Shut the door of your external senses, dive deep into yourself, and contemplate. Then you have the ability to understand your own mind; hold on to your own being and purify it slowly. The whole struggle is a mental struggle.



Ramakrishna's Influence on Girish's Plays

Swami Chetanananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

Purnachandra

RAMAKRISHNA said: 'Faithful devotees always feel the all-auspicious Lord in their hearts and are never discouraged, even when facing thousands of dangers.'

Girish illustrated this teaching in the life of the title character of his play *Purnachandra*.

Purnachandra is a five-act play, and its themes are ideal renunciation and faith in God. The drama is based on a Hindi story entitled *Puran Bhakat* ('The Devotee Purna'). *Purnachandra* was first staged on 17 March 1888 at the Emerald Theatre in Calcutta.

The main characters:

Gorakshanath, a perfect yogi
Shalibahan, the king of Sialkot
Purnachandra, son of the king
Sundara, princess of Punjab
Sari, Sundara's female confidante

Purna is a prince, but he wants to become a monk. He renounces everything and leaves home to become a disciple of the yogi Gorakshanath. His guru says to him: 'Monastic life is a difficult path. You were brought up in luxury in the palace, and this life is full of austerities and hardships. You will have to live on alms, sleep on the ground or under a tree, and meditate in the forest surrounded by wild animals.'

Purna agrees to fulfil all of these conditions, then takes monastic vows. Gorakshanath decides to test him.

Sundara, the princess of Punjab, is unmarried and looking for a husband. One day she says to her female confidante: 'The man who is proud of learning, I defeat in argument and make a fool of him. He who is proud of wealth becomes overwhelmed

when he sees my treasury. He who is proud of his own beauty becomes my slave when he sees my beauty. A man's pride is his sword, but when most men see my banner from a distance, they drop their sword.'

Gorakshanath sends Purna to Sundara to beg for food. When she sees Purna, she falls in love with him. Sundara says to her companion: 'Sari, this young yogi is my beloved. I know the signs of a yogi. His mind is absorbed in God and he is free from worldliness.'

Sundara offers him a gold coin, but he returns it and asks only for food. She invites him to enter her palace, but he refuses, saying that a monk should not enter such a place.

Sundara then follows Purna with food to meet Gorakshanath. On the way she asks him: 'If I ask for something from your guru, shall I get it?'

Purna replies: 'My guru is a wish-fulfilling tree. Whatever you ask for, you will get.'

After reaching Gorakshanath, Sundara says to him: 'Lord, I want this young monk to be my husband.'

Gorakshanath immediately tells Purna: 'Go with this woman now. Do as I wish.'

Purna: 'O guru, may my mind be absorbed in you and may I never be deluded by maya.'

Sundara: 'My desire is fulfilled by the grace of this wish-fulfilling guru.'

Purna says to Sundara: 'You have lost the nectar of immortality. You have bad luck.'

After Sundara, Sari, and Purna have left, one of Gorakshanath's disciples asks him: 'Master, what is



this? This woman wants to fulfil her worldly desires and you have offered Purna to her.'

Gorakshanath responds: 'Purna is a real yogi; he is able to pass very difficult tests. Moreover, only a true monk can remain undisturbed by the temptations of beautiful women and great wealth.'

By the grace of his guru, Purna maintains his unbroken celibacy: Sundara's beauty, wealth, and humble pleas leave him unmoved.

Purna tells Sundara: 'This worldly relationship is momentary; a physical relationship is nothing but slavery. Look, the union between Atman and Atman never breaks; in that plane one enjoys bliss continuously. Offer your heart to Lord Shiva and we will be united in God-consciousness forever. Dissolve your mind in the Atman and shun all worldly relationships. This non-dualistic knowledge will remove all perception of multiplicity and you will find no difference between man and woman.'

Sundara finally gives up her desire to be Purna's wife. She tells him: 'O Lord, may I have that dualistic knowledge birth after birth, so that I can worship you and serve you. I don't want to be an obstacle in your path. I shall not bind you. You go wherever you like. Your happiness is my happiness.'

Purna: 'O blessed one, I bless you that you may have unflinching devotion to Lord Shiva.'

Sundara: 'I don't want God, I have no desire other than to serve you. O yogi, I bow down to you. Forgive all my faults.'

Purna returns to his guru Gorakshanath, who is delighted that his disciple passed the test.

Sundara begins leading a nun's life and serves Purna's elderly mother.

Girish portrayed Ramakrishna's uncompromising renunciation in this drama.

Nasiram

In the title character of this play Girish portrayed Ramakrishna and his teachings about how lust and love—the animal nature and the divine nature—coexist in human beings. Girish also showed how the divine overcomes the bestial. *Nasiram* was first staged on 25 May 1888 at the Star Theatre in Hati-

bagan, Calcutta. It is a five-act play.

The main characters:

Nasiram, a god-intoxicated man
Yogeshnath, king of Bengal
Anathnath, a prince
Kapalik, the guru of the king
Sona, the female companion of the Kapalik
Viraja, a woman posing as a princess

Nasiram is a god-intoxicated man whom people considered to be mad. Regarding himself, Nasiram says: 'I want neither to die nor to live; I want neither the palace nor the shade of a tree; I want to eat neither fancy food nor a few grains of rice. I know that one day I am happy and the next day unhappy; these two rascals—good and bad—are companions.'

'People call me mad. I have seen those rascals: some are mad after money, some for name and fame, some for women, and some for children. I chant only God's name.'

Prince Anath: 'Nasiram, don't you have any desires?'

Nasiram: 'Show me one thing that one should ask for. Everything in this world is empty, false, and impermanent. Look at this beautiful girl: she will be ashes one day. Your friends and relatives exist today, but you don't know where they will be tomorrow. Today you may be rich; tomorrow you may be a pauper. Clay is money and money is clay. I don't find anything that I want in this world.'

Prince Anath: 'Don't you want God?'

Nasiram: 'He is looking after me, so why should I want him?'

Prince Anath: 'My goodness! You say that God is looking after you?'

Nasiram: 'Of course he is. And not only that, He looks after birds and beasts, ants and insects. He provides food and shelter to each and all. I watch him and enjoy the fun. He plays hide and seek. He is everywhere, supplying everything to all, and people think they are doing everything themselves. If you watch carefully, you will enjoy this worldly fun and frivolities. In every home you will see the puppet show going on.'¹⁷

Anath fell in love with Viraja, a beautiful, clever

Girish at Work · Girish's mind worked so fast and prodigiously that he required secretaries to take down his words. ... Absorbed in the flow of ideas, he would pace back and forth in his room and dictate all the dialogues of the drama in a loud voice, as if he were acting each role himself. His secretary always kept three pencils ready at hand. He could not use a pen and inkpot because there was never enough time to dip the pen into the pot. Once his secretary could not keep up with the speed of the dictation and asked Girish to repeat what he had just said. Girish became angry and asked him not to break his mood. He told the secretary to put dots where he had missed words, and [that] he would fill them in later.

There are many stories about his writing talent. ... *Sitar Vanabash* (The Banishment of Sita) was written in one night. He also wrote twenty-six songs for *Sadhavar Ekadashi* in just one night. Sister Devamata mentioned in *Days in an Indian Monastery*, 'One of the greatest, a six-act drama entitled *Vilwamangal the Saint*, was written in twenty-eight hours of uninterrupted labour.'

—*They Lived with God*, 306

girl, but his father wanted to end their relationship. One day Nasiram taught Anath how one can transform lust into love: 'You can have a physical relationship for a long time—but for how long? A relationship based on divine love is everlasting. Try to understand the difference between lust and love: Lust shrinks the mind, but love expands the mind. Love is all-pervading, all-encompassing.

'Distribute love in this world. Love all those who are poor, fallen, and wretched. The love of God is unending. Distribute this love as much as you can. My work is over.'

Ramakrishna always depended on the Divine Mother; Girish dramatized this in the character of Nasiram. He taught people to surrender to God. He transformed the lustful king into a devotee of God.

King Yogeshnath: 'Nasiram, do you hate me?'

Nasiram: 'How can I hate you? I am also a slave to my senses, as you are. Look, I have this wonderful human life; still I do not have that intense love

for God. So I ask you to call on God.'

King: 'Haribol, Haribol! Will Lord Hari accept me?'

Nasiram: 'You do your work, and he will do his. O King, if God had not accepted you, how could you chant his name?'

Viraja: 'Master, I am a sinner. Will God have mercy on me?'

Nasiram: 'What do you mean? It is God's job to show mercy to the fallen. One of his names is "saviour of the fallen". Those who think they are fallen, God also accepts. Simply chant God's name. He will be with you.'

A false monk named Kapalik ruined a young woman's life and made her his mistress. Nasiram was very fond of that innocent woman, Sona, so he decided to save her from this situation. He asked her to chant God's name. But Sona was hurt and asked Nasiram: 'Why should I chant Hari's name? Who made me a prostitute? Who forced me to become addicted to alcohol? Who made me helpless? Is it not Hari who did all these things? And now you are asking me to chant Hari's name?'

Nasiram: 'If you do not want to chant Hari's name, let me chant while you listen.' (4.252).

Sona's life is eventually transformed and she becomes a great devotee of God.

Hemendra Nath Das Gupta wrote:

In *Nasiram*, the influence of Ramakrishna Paramahansa is more than evident. Through every word and every act of Nasiram, we seem to see Girish sitting at the feet of Paramahansa Deva and wielding his pen as if at his Master's bidding. Nasiram is mad in the eyes of the worldly-wise. Surely he must be a mad fellow who loves everybody and hates none, not even the most despicable. Nasiram sees even in the worst sinner, the great possibilities that may be attained by him, for the human soul is but God in man.¹⁸



Ramakrishna's influence is evident throughout Girish's works. The Master asked Girish to continue his acting and writing in order to educate the masses. Girish saw how some wealthy young men

became trapped by the courtesans in red-light districts, losing their money, prestige, and manliness, as well as the love of their family and friends.

Girish's drama *Vishad*, based on the story of Queen Madalasa from the Markandeya Purana, opened at the Emerald Theatre on 6 October 1888. King Alarka was a highly spiritual man but through the influence of an evil friend he began leading an immoral life. Girish vividly showed in this drama how Queen Saraswati changed her husband's life through her love, purity, humility, and self-sacrifice.



This world is a den of miseries; there is no real joy in worldly pleasures. Earthly love is gross and selfish. Divine love is the goal of life, and it alone can save human beings from miseries. Herein lies the liberation of man.

Girish wrote his drama *Jana* based on a story from the 'Ashwamedha Parva of the Mahabharata that vividly portrays Jana's motherhood and Bidushaka's devotion and faith. *Jana* was first staged on 23 December 1893 at the Minerva Theatre. Ardhendu Shekhar Mustafi acted in the role of Bidushaka for a few nights and then left for the Emerald Theatre. Girish took over the role. His performance made a deep impression on the audience.

Ramakrishna said: 'You must have heard about

the tremendous power of faith. It is said in the Purāna that Rāma, who was God Himself—the embodiment of Absolute Brahman—had to build a bridge to cross the sea to Ceylon [now Sri Lanka]. But Hanumān, trusting in Rāma's name, cleared the sea in one jump and reached the other side. He had no need of a bridge.'¹⁹

In *Jana* Girish depicted this tangible faith and pure love.

We also find the influence of Ramakrishna in Girish's other plays, such as *Pandav Gaurav*, *Swapner Phul*, *Maner Matan*, *Shankaracharya*, *Ashok*, and *Tapobal*. Again, Girish based some of his plays on Swami Vivekananda's ideal of serving human beings as God; these plays include *Mayavasan*, *Bhranti*, *Balidan*, *Grihalakshmi*, *Shasti ki Shanti*. One could write a whole book on this topic alone.

Girish received unbounded love and devotion through the grace of Ramakrishna, and this he translated into his life. Through his plays he shared this grace with others.



References

17. *Girish Rachanavali*, 4, 235–6.
18. Hemendra Nath Das Gupta, 'The Influence of Ramakrishna Paramahansa on Girish Chandra's Dramas', *Prabuddha Bharata*, 38/4 (April 1933), 194.
19. *Gospel*, 87.

Girish Ghosh (centre) with a group of sannyasins and devotees



REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



Knowing beyond Knowledge

Thomas A Forsthoefer

Motilal Banarsidass, 41 U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007. E-mail: mlbd@vsnl.com. 2007. xii + 199 pp. Rs 395.

Interreligious dialogue has had a short but chequered history. As John B Chethimattam has observed, so far it has largely been a Western enterprise conducted within the scientific vision of the modern period with an objectivist concern for neat systems, with their classifications and clear differences. Today, with post-modernists calling this objectivism into question, there is a real crisis in dialogue. In this context, Vedanta—both classical and modern—can provide a common language for religious experience, particularly for understanding religious visions from the epistemological point of view.

Western scholars have long displayed a distinct tendency to abhor metaphysics as a cognitive science, thereby highlighting epistemology as a separate discipline. Scholars have also decried the claim of religion as 'a science of being' and suggested that religious language is evocative of ethical standards or simple emotions. But the outright rejection of metaphysics by contemporary philosophers often assumes what is to be proved. Can one disclaim the truth that our attempts at knowing, and the way we go about it, often involves metaphysical assumptions? In Advaita Vedanta, metaphysical questions are often accompanied by epistemological analyses. In *Knowing beyond Knowledge*, Thomas Forsthoefer has undertaken a meticulous inquiry into the epistemic truths of classical and modern Advaita.

There is a powerfully argued view held by many philosophers of science that the theoretical entities postulated in science are only instruments for organizing the data of sense experience and cannot be taken to be really existing unless they are technologically manipulable. Experimental manipulation and generation of new phenomena with the help of the postulated entities is a prerequisite for admit-

ting the existence of these entities. In underscoring the empirical basis of postulated realities, Advaita Vedanta is in consonance with these philosophers of science and epistemologists. Forsthoefer is justified in declaring that there are subtleties, nuances, ambiguities, and apparent contradictions in Shankara's works, many of which have been carefully examined by contemporary thinkers. But there is a clear metaphysic operating across Shankara's texts, which often serves as the principal focus for exegetes. Shankara is concerned about the problem of suffering and the hope of liberation, so his metaphysic is decisively linked to soteriological goals.

J N Mohanty has argued persuasively that Advaita Vedanta, in its pure essence, is not a religion. It is a philosophy that conceptualizes an alleged experience—of one's Atman—which is not an experience of something intrinsically sacred, but whose religious character is derived from associations with the concrete religious life of the community. The Advaitin worships his own guru and possibly Shiva, who symbolizes the Atman. That worship may have its own sacral or religious connotations, and results in a superimposition, *adhyāsa*, of sacredness upon the experience of the Atman. In the words of K C Bhattacharyya, 'the striving after self-knowledge is not felt as sacred if it is an activity geared towards reaching a goal through one's own might and not through grace'.

After undertaking a brief overview of the epistemological theories of religious experience in classical and modern Vedanta, the author has devoted considerable space to the writings of Sureshwara and Padmapada, as well as to an analysis of the Sanskrit text *Vivekachudamani*. Sureshwara is the standard-bearer of the teachings of his master—Shankara. He affirms that liberation is not an achievement, for 'if release were the fruit of action, it would be non-eternal, like heaven'. Padmapada, a disciple of Shankara, 'would like to see philosophy as utilizing a peculiar method of cognition, unlike that of science and ordinary affairs, but for all that rational'. According to him, liberation is the spontaneous and permanent apprehension of one's true being obtained by hearing the Vedic dictum *tat-tvam-asi*. 'Such a method would be

a kind of direct experience, not necessarily expressible, but at least in some sense, cognitive. This, Padmapada thinks, is what Shankara has in mind, rather than the more mystical intuition which Sureshwara found in Shankara's pronouncements.'

The author has discussed in detail a modern version of Advaita, that of Ramana Maharshi. 'Although not an erudite scholar, he has the wisdom that comes from direct experience of Reality.' For him the knowledge gained from experience is direct, immediate, and alive—his experience was an encounter with 'living truth' and no 'mere intellectual process.' According to him, such 'felt knowledge' transcended rational categories or circuitous intellectualism. He translated the *Vivekachudamani* into Tamil, and this offered him 'the opportunity to interpret both his experiences and the tradition of Advaita.' In Ramana's writings one can discover a decisive inward-directed epistemology of religious experience along with a universalist Advaita freed from its local context. According to the author, 'Ramana ushers in a universalism that is in harmony with the premises of Advaita.'

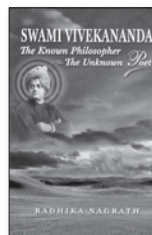
In the concluding section of the book the author has discussed the cognitive and social implications of the epistemology of religious experience. According to Advaita, *anubhava* or experience constitutes our deepest selves and the deepest truths of reality—it is a self-guaranteeing event, co-extensive with a knowing beyond knowledge. Such non-dual knowing is a kind of transcendental experience which ranges far beyond the scope of discursive reasoning. Towards the end of this section the author has not forgotten to refer to Ramanuja's philosophy and its cultural and epistemic virtues. Ramanuja relies heavily on external causal processes—the entire constellation of Vaishnava sadhana, including all the intellectual, affective, and conative training implied by bhakti.

After a searching analysis of the different original texts of the Vedantic tradition, Forsthoefel has rightly arrived at the conclusion that philosophy of religion as a critical, cross-cultural, and constructive programme makes inroads into the deepest truths of reality, even when, as in the case of Advaita, such truths culminate, in a non-conceptual, non-dual knowing beyond knowledge.

The book should inspire serious scholars and students to continue their academic pursuit of higher and richer truths.

Prof. Amalendu Chakraborty

Former Head, Department of Philosophy
Presidency College, Kolkata



Swami Vivekananda: The Known Philosopher, the Unknown Poet
Radhika Nagrath

Meteor Books, 170/43 Lake Gardens,
Kolkata 700 045. 2007. 244 pp. Rs 100.
Distributed by: Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi
Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014. E-mail:
mail@advaitaashrama.org.

Humans are programmed to try and understand the world around them. This has given rise to various disciplines of science as well as the arts. Poetry too is an attempt at understanding nature. The poet tries to penetrate into nature's essence and perceive something that is not ordinarily seen by other people. According to the Romantic tradition, a sense of wonder is an essential quality in a poet; childlike simplicity is another. The good poet crosses the boundaries of the self and tries to see it manifested in the manifoldness around.

Swami Vivekananda had his real introduction to poetry when his teacher William Hastie 'was explaining Wordsworth's *Excursion*, where the state of trance is referred to, and of which the poet had had a glimpse while contemplating the beauties of nature'. Hastie pointed out that 'such an experience is the result of purity of mind and concentration on some particular object', and that he had seen only one person who had experienced that blessed state of mind: Ramakrishna Paramahansa of Dakshineswar. Thus it was through poetry that Swami Vivekananda first heard about his guru Sri Ramakrishna.

Swami Vivekananda was not a poet in the conventional sense of the term, but the depth, beauty, and clarity of his thoughts—when he chose to write in verse—is remarkable. His poems are metaphysical and they uncover metaphysics as revealed through nature and the human mind. In the Indian tradition, *kavi*—'poet' or 'seer'—is synonymous with *rishi*. Even God is called a poet. Swamiji says, 'I never read of any more beautiful conception of God than the following: "He is the Great Poet, the Ancient Poet; the whole universe is His poem, coming in verses and rhymes and rhythms, written in infinite bliss."' And Swami Vivekananda was a rishi of the highest order.

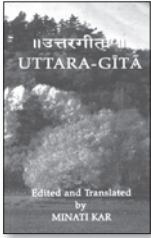
The book under review is a comprehensive study of Swami Vivekananda as a poet by Radhika Nagrath, who has been working patiently and painstakingly on Swamiji's poems for several years. She

discusses the spiritual, philosophical, and nationalist strands of Swamiji's poetry, examines the themes of 'renunciation' and 'detachment' around which he weaves several of his poems, compares his metaphysical thought as well as his monistic articulations with that of classical metaphysical poets of the West and shows how his compositions are so very 'Indian' in their symbolism, imagery, and structure.

Though the text could have been helped with better copy-editing, it is a seminal work on Swami Vivekananda that makes for absorbing reading. The author reminds us that 'there is a lot of research to be done on the poetic technique, symbolism, and the use of semiotics in his poetry'. Scholars definitely need to heed this cue.

Swami Satyamayananda

Acharya, Probationers' Training Centre
Belur Math



Uttara-Gītā

Ed. and trans. Minati Kar

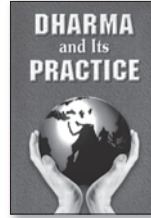
Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata 700 029. E-mail: rmic@vsnl.com. 2007. xvi + 88. Rs 40.

Uttara-gita is one of the three *Krishna-gitas*, the other two being the *Bhagavadgita* and the *Anu-gita*. The present book is a lucid translation of the text of the *Uttara-gita*. The text consists of a hundred and twenty-two verses spread over three chapters. The first chapter discusses the nature of the Atman using numerous simple imageries. The concepts of *śabda-brahman*, *pañcakośas*, *pañcikarāṇa*, and the theory of evolution and dissolution of the world based on the primal sound 'Om' have been discussed. Verses nineteen to twenty-two bring home the point that there is no need for scriptures once the aspirant realizes the ultimate Reality, Brahman. This reminds one of Sri Ramakrishna's metaphor that once the contents of a letter are known there is no further use for the letter. The second chapter describes the yogic chakras, the regions of the body where they are located, and the planes of consciousness that they relate to. The final chapter summarizes the characteristics of an illumined soul.

Though brief, the *Uttara-gita* clearly explains the nature of the Atman and the method to realize it, primarily through yoga. This book serves as a supplementary text to the *Bhagavadgita*. It is a text that inspires aspirants to intensify their spiritual practices.

A Sanskrit commentary on the main text ascribed to Gaudapadacharya has also been provided. A glossary of Sanskrit terms would come in handy for those unacquainted with Indian philosophy as would the details of the seven yogic chakras taken from Tantric texts. This slim volume should be a welcome reading for all students of Indian philosophy and should act as a guide for spiritual aspirants.

Swami Narasimhananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata



Dharma and Its Practice

A Vedanta Kesari Presentation

Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai
600 004. E-mail: srkmath@vsnl.com.
2008. vi + 218 pp. Rs 50.

The 1984 annual issue of *Vedanta Kesari* was a symposium on 'Dharma and Its Practice', which has in turn become this handy book. Most of the articles are authored by experienced writers or speakers who have been exposed to different world cultures. The subject matter is diversely accessed, mainly from Indian scriptures—where the concept of dharma is dealt with *in extenso*—and sporadically sprinkled with examples from other traditions.

The proper understanding and practice of dharma is considered in almost all the articles as the key to attaining integration and avoiding self-destruction at personal, social, or national levels. However, if the purpose of this book is to reach the Indian youth, who are going to live in a challenging nation that is slowly taking a leading role in different fields and where the means for effecting good or evil are reaching the population in massive doses—from cellphone to weaponry, from education to freedom of action—then injection of greater dynamism by including articles discussing contemporary ethical problems would definitely have been welcome. This consideration aside, a particularly lucid rendering of the topic is the article 'Dharma: Eternal, Universal and Vital', by Swami Sastrananda.

The book in general contains valuable material for those who wish to study dharma, especially for teachers or speakers who have to frame diverse presentations for young audiences, the segment of the population that is increasingly insisting on knowing in convincing and appealing ways what is right and what is wrong, who dictates so, and why and how is one to follow dharma and avoid adharma.

PB

REPORTS

New Trustees of the Ramakrishna Order

Swami Tattwavidananda and Swami Vimalatmananda have been appointed trustees of the Ramakrishna Math and members of the governing body of the Ramakrishna Mission.

New Centre in Russia

Ramakrishna Society, St Petersburg, Russia, has been made a branch centre of the Ramakrishna Math. Its address is: Ramakrishna Society, Ulitsa Pestelya, Dom 8, Apartment 70, St Petersburg 191028, Russia. Phone: 7-812-273-3544.

Home for Terminally-ill Patients

On 6 August 2008 the Ramakrishna Abalindi Home, Inanda, South Africa, was declared open by the Hon. Dr Z L Mkhize, Minister for Finance and Economic Development, KwaZulu/Natal. These facilities were built by the **Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa** and handed over on that day to the office-bearers of the home. The home, intended for terminally-ill patients, comprises three sections of 45 beds, offices, stock rooms, bathrooms, and other amenities. The home will provide a much needed facility for HIV-AIDS and cancer patients in the area.



Caregivers assisting a patient at Ramakrishna Abalindi Home

News from Centres

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh,



conducted a child eye care programme in a school of a poor locality of Chandigarh from 11 August to 4 October. 2,725 children were examined and out of them 306 having refractory errors were provided glasses free of charge.

Ramakrishna Mission, Shikshanamandira, Belur, organized a function on 24 August to mark its golden jubilee. Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the function.

From 29 July to 3 August **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Belgaum**, conducted a programme termed Viveka Vahini, with the purpose of inculcating in the youth higher values for self-development and formation of character. It consisted of Vedic chanting, bhajans, lectures, classes, audio-video presentations, and free distribution of selected books. A team of 7 monks and 3 volunteers from the ashrama visited different schools and colleges in rural areas in the districts of Belgaum, Bagalkote, and Raichur. A mobile bookstall was provided at all the places where the programme was conducted. More than 5,200 students were reached.

Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Porbandar, has launched a value education programme to inculcate higher values in students of schools and colleges in and around Porbandar. The programme includes exhibits on holy personalities, talks on values, multimedia presentations on personality development, and distribution of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature.

On 6 September, the **Vedanta Society of Toronto, Canada**, organized a seminar on 'Communicating Vedanta' as part of its fortieth anniversary celebrations. Swami Prabhanandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, was the guest-in-chief on the occasion.



Relief

Flood Relief • Centres in Bihar and other states are continuing their relief operations in affected areas. Details of the relief materials distributed by them during the month of September are as follows. In Bihar—**Katihar**: 49,800 kg chira, 8,584 kg gur, 21,740 packets of biscuits, 400,000 halogen tablets, 1,700 torches, 1,500 chadars, 420 saris, 280 dhotis, 282 mats, and 1,500 stainless steel utensil sets (1 plate, 1 bowl, and 1 glass per set) to about 1,200 families belonging to Madhepura district which have taken shelter in temporary camps at Rupauli town in Purnea district, and some 1,500 families belonging to Pranpur block of Katihar district. **Muzaffarpur**: 26,620 kg chira, 3,105 kg gur, 250 kg sugar, 12,250 kg rice, 600 kg flour, 1,870 kg dal, 611 kg chana, 150 kg soya bean, 150 kg potatoes, 20 kg salt, 154 kg biscuits, 2,375 l drinking water, 1,200 matchboxes, 531,500 halogen tablets, and 42,000 assorted garments to 33,985 flood-affected families belonging to 107 villages of Madhepura and Saharsa districts. Besides, the centre treated 1,240 flood-stricken patients. **Patna**: 150,000 packets of biscuits, 5,000 kg milk powder, 5,000 kg chhatu, 10,000 steel plates, 10,000 steel tumblers, 10,000 saris, 10,000 dhotis, 10,000 towels, and 700,000 halogen tablets to about 10,000 flood-affected families belonging to Purnea, Madhepura, and Supaul districts. Besides, the centre served cooked food and distributed 5,000 kg chira, 500 kg gur, 40,000 packets of biscuits, and 40,000 fruit bars to around 1,000 families belonging to Fervisganj subdivision of Araria district near Nepal border. Medical care was also provided. In Gujarat—**Limbd**: 3,000 kg bajra, 3,000 kg rice, 1,200 kg dal, 1,200 kg cooking oil, 1,200 kg sugar, 180 kg tea, and 600 chadars to nearly 600 flood-affected families of a village near Nal Sarovar in Surendranagar district. In Orissa—**Bhubaneswar**: 5,280 kg chira, 1,320 kg sugar, 5,280 packets of biscuits, 1,320 kg salt, 5,280 candles, and 5,280 matchboxes to 1,320 flood-

affected families of Pipili block in Puri district; and 1,230 school bags, 2,460 notebooks, 2,460 pens, and other study materials to 1,230 flood-affected students of 10 schools in Bhadrak and Jajpur districts. **Puri Math**: 1,500 kg rice, 300 kg flour, and 300 kg chira to 375 flood victims belonging to 3 villages of Tigiri and Banki blocks in Puri district. **Puri Mission**: 5,000 kg chira and 500 kg sugar to about 1,000 flood-affected families belonging to 13 villages of Gop block in Puri district. In Uttar Pradesh—**Lucknow**: 2,000 kg chira, 500 kg sugar, 3,935 kg rice, 1,090 kg flour, 460 kg dal, 4,489 kg vegetables, 490 dozen bananas, 1,500 saris, 580 dhotis, 900 lungis, 1,390 shirts, 1,390 pants, 2,528 other garments, 940 blankets, and 940 mats to 940 flood-affected families belonging to 8 villages of Bakshi-Ka-Talab tahsil in Lucknow district. Besides, the centre treated 2,341 flood-stricken patients. In West Bengal—**Belgharia**: 555 saris, 271 dhotis, 571 shirts, 319 pants, 64 sweaters, 1,136 children's garments, and 419 blankets to 197 families belonging to 2 villages of Purba Medinipur and Paschim Medinipur districts. The centre also added 1,085 books to the book-banks it had created two months ago in Paschim Medinipur district for the benefit of students whose books had been washed away in the flood. **Malda**: 6,008 kg rice, 313 kg dal, 1,771 kg potatoes, 600 kg salt, 300 kg sugar, and 130 kg biscuits to 558 flood-affected families of 8 villages in Harishchandrapur – II block, Malda district. **Manasadwip**: 1,802 kg chira and 300 kg sugar to 1,236 families belonging to 4 villages of Sagar block in South 24 Parganas district. **Taki**: 3,650 kg chira, 523 kg gur, 81 kg biscuits, 36 kg milk powder, and 35,000 halogen tablets to 764 families belonging to 8 villages of Minakha block in North 24 Parganas district.

Distress Relief • The following centres distributed various items to needy persons. **Belgharia**: 266 saris, 104 dhotis, 427 shirts, 213 pants, 561 children's garments, 220 blankets, and 79 sweaters to 220 families of Naihati and Jaipur blocks in North 24 Parganas and Bankura districts. **Garbeta**: 168 saris, 45 dhotis, 38 lungis, 20 shirts, and 20 vests to 120 families. **Ichapur**: 1,100 kg rice, 660 kg flour, 220 kg dal, 220 kg coconut oil, and 440 kg salt to 220 families of 3 villages in Khanakul – I block, Hooghly district. **Kanchipuram**: school uniforms to 21 children, notebooks and other study materials to 750 poor students, and 30 tarpaulins to 23 families. **Narainpur**: school bags, books, notebooks, pens, and other study materials to 450 poor students. **Puri Math**: school uniforms to 97 poor students. ☞